

# FIRST SESSION **SETTING THE SCENE: CONCEPT AND REALITY**



**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 10:00 – 11:30 /GMT/**



**Lord Toby Harris**

Chair of the UK National Preparedness Commission, President of the ISRM



**Jaroslav Romanchuk**

Chief Economist (Pravoliberalni Rukh), President of the Scientific Research Mises Center, Presidential Candidate in Belarus



**Sheela Patel**

Director of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres



**Xavier Castellanos**

Under Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Dr Rubens welcomed everyone to the ISRM-CSWP GUR conference, and introduced the idea behind it, which was to mark the launching of the CSWP and the first major Program (GUR) over 18 months with local and international partners and in partnership with the UK National preparedness commission.

He explained that the format is the usual one for the ISRM, which is having people who devoted their lives to GUR having an open conversation, a round table discussion, and open to questions.

Dr Rubens introduced the three panellists, giving their background.

Lord Harris was the first to give a speech, saying that the topic is close to his heart. He explained that the role of the national preparedness commission is to promote what is needed for more resilience in the UK and to mitigate and recover from challenges. He spoke about his passion for this topic and his pleasure at spending years as an elected politician. He then spoke of the multitude of factors needed to make a city resilient, and how the community shapes the wellbeing of the young as **“It takes a village to raise a child”**. He described cities as complex places where leaders face many dilemmas and choices, having to change and adapt, while the community needs to cooperate. He noted the many successive crises in recent years, bushfires in Sydney, the explosion in Lebanon, various floods, where some cities fare better than others, as some communities are more resilient against weather emergencies and other threats.

He asked, what makes a city more resilient? All mayors face similar dilemmas, and can't be laissez faire about it, further asking that while London is described as a model that worked, could it continue? He warned that muddling through was not an option, and that leaders have to have a vision for resilience and has to be shared by the people, as resilience was not a straightforward thing, as even streets are filled with dilemmas:

We have to make citizens mobile but can't use more cars on congested roads, we want to eliminate social exclusion and urban distress but have a limited budget, we need to decrease our carbon footprint but want to support business. Resolving these dilemmas is effective city governance, with the daily pursuit of compromise, where it is necessary to survive the pressure on the city and to allow it to develop and grow.

He spoke of the key needs of modern cities and the necessary vision which goes beyond social inclusion and environment. He encapsulated his point through the concept of the 3 Es: **Economy, Equity, Environment**. All these focuses require resilience as the key criteria.

A city needs water and energy supplies that can grow and adapt, it has infrastructure needs that must expand in line with changes in the city, it must be flexible with shocks and stresses no matter the origin of the stress. All of this resilience needs to be built in, so it can deal with floods and other problems on the go, with infrastructure needing to be resilient to failure.

He then asked: **Is future growth possible without increasing vulnerability?** Social resilience is crucial, and communities with strong social capital fare better recover from disasters, making social bonds a key element. How to build social resilience is not an easy question, but is very important as two thirds of people will live in cities by the end of the decade, so urban resilience has to take centre stage. Cities need an economy that works, diverse industries, they shouldn't rely on one source of employment, they need a dynamic economy that encourages innovation, and citizens must have access to training, education and employment. These are all major tasks for the city leaders. Cities also need an environment with a robust and sound infrastructure, meeting basic needs, with sustainable access to water, energy, and a coherent land use policy.

At the same time it is necessary to have social-governance structures that are open, inclusive and coherent. The city needs to work for all its citizens in all 3 Es and they need to be balanced. The infrastructure, utilities and roads need to be robust and withstand hazards, which requires planning and an understanding of the acceptable failure limits. Without social resilience physical resilience is insufficient, and thus it must be addressed, a strong community which is based on partnership makes it easier to withstand threats. That requires strong leadership, which needs to inspire trust.

At the end he wondered if he is perhaps an idealist or an optimist, but that this resilience is not too much to ask, as without these cities cannot thrive.

Dr Rubens added that cities are among the most complex problems, which are not easy to solve, yet these are challenges which we all face and so we have to engage with them while keeping in mind that they are growing exponentially.

Jaroslav Romanschuk described himself as primarily an economist who worked on economic transition. He lamented that it is one thing to live in democracy and enjoy the virtues of freedom, but that it's much different when you are at war or live in a totalitarian country. He spoke of the main challenges Ukraine faced focusing on defence and having 10 million external and internal migrants. This poses challenges for cities to solve basic dwelling problems, transportation, education, social security, creating markedly different challenges for Ukraine than elsewhere because of war. He said that **one of the major issues is how to teach local communities self governance, for in totalitarianism decision making is centralised.** He said that he would appreciate advice on how to decentralise political and economic systems, and questions of budgetary distribution, but that it was hard to prioritise non-military goals during wartime.

He noted that urban development is challenging, especially as in soviet times energy supplies were centralised, while another challenge are air pollutants, and arranging fiscal policy. He argued that while the west had stable policies for decades, the quality of institutions and governance in the post-soviet area is weak and fragile, saying that good intentions lead not to sustainability, but often to creating oligarchy and corruption and irresponsible behaviour and abuse of public funds. He explained that it is unsustainable to simply give resources to local authorities and expect vibrant communities. The agenda is therefore in Ukraine dramatically different, and a combination of security issues is primary.

The cities that could benefit from migration were not ready with their infrastructure for such a large number. He stressed the importance of concentrating on the wider definition of urban development inclusive of fiscal and security concerns, as Ukraine is still a very centralised country, and the formal structures are often not the ones that make major decisions. He made the point that it is necessary to overhaul the economic system and not rely on international aid.

Dr. Rubens commented that Ukraine really had to adjust to a major shock, the need to move massive amounts of people west under wartime conditions and disruption to governance. Ukraine is demonstrating what a country in shock looks like, and has done it incredibly well, becoming used Crisis. He quoted Reagan in saying that "I'm from the government, I'm gonna help you" are very frightening words, as in Ukraine you can't wait for the government and have to be self-reliant in your community.

Mr Romanschuk added that it's a feature of Ukrainians to be resilient, **Kiev didn't fall in 3 days as expected, people have unity, communities got together and volunteered to defend the country.** He saw this as unparalleled, not because the government wanted communities to organise but because they on their own wanted to help their communities, directing all the rage to the aggressor.

He noted that in urban development, if people are free to make their own communities that would free their potential, and international cooperation would not be based on the centralised government designs to post-war restructuring. He recommended to focus efforts on major cities of over 100 thousand people, decentralising the approach and connecting communities in urban development, such as with creating twin cities, as that would be more effective. He noted that the west should urge the Kiev government to restructure the post-victory country in a decentralised way.

Dr. Rubens then invited Ms. Patel into the conversation, commenting that the slums are a sophisticated and developed network of people that is often ignored by city planners, and that if we look at the urban experience, it is that unmanaged population that has a lot of influence on the challenges of the city.

Sheela Patel began by saying that **all cities in the world are in crisis, and that everything that you have in the north that they have in the south was designed in the 19th century**, speaking of how in India they are struggling to get rid of the old strategy and failing, not looking at the new trends. Regarding Ukraine, she supported the rights of communities to look at how they want to reconstruct their neighbourhoods and infrastructure locally, noting that global structures are very centralised and localised, and even though the governments are well meaning, their models don't work for the majority of the world's population. The world has the same dichotomy globally as it has locally, the minority own the majority of wealth at every level, and that speaks of the fracturing of how we design our economies. She spoke of Mumbai where 20 million live in the metropolitan area, over 60 percent of them illegally, informally and invisibly in the city where it is difficult to legalise anything. The global south is locked in these percentages, whereas most of the land is owned by a few people, cities are swallowing villages and people's lives.

**She noted that 60 percent of people live in urban environments globally**, but if villages are sorted out there won't be overpopulation in the cities, but the climate crisis and disaster are making this exponential explosion worse where rural areas will become urbanised, urban areas expanded. People need to demand accountability from their government structures, which is a long and difficult process.

She said that we shouldn't separate development and climate change, as we can't treat it separately, adding that lives in cities are interconnected and that ignoring the connection between climate change and development is disastrous for people in the developing world. She stressed that we need a foundation of climate science and energy transition, as we are becoming a water scarce planet but are still misusing water in sewage and elsewhere. She spoke of the need to believe in the power of collectives, and need to identify what local communities want, needing preventive resilience production, and to fix the problem before it becomes worse. She also spoke of the need to reconstitute how we develop, what is needed and how to make it happen, as there is no silver bullet. She stressed that we need to ask local communities for their views on development, find support and imagine new ways of solving "wicked problems". No one strategy can solve all problems, the intergenerational challenges that we face will not be easily sorted out. She mentioned that the COP we were all told by the UN that we haven't passed 15 percent of the SDG aspirations, have a 1.5 percent increase in temperature, so that we urgently need new strategies and partnerships. She referenced the 3 Es and spoke of the 3 Is: invisible, illegal, informal, adding that whether it's Ukraine, or people affected by natural disasters, all disasters will have to be put together because the world is interconnected, no crisis is local anymore, sharing what she had learned from poor women: "show me that it works, don't lecture me or throw money at me, show me how it works."

Dr. Rubens commented on Ms. Patel being inspirational, and agreed with her sentiments by saying that research is now done by helicopter, without engaging with the local population. He added that empowerment at a local level is necessary, for experts in nice suits giving money to organisations who claim to deliver something is ineffective, as people who deliver the money don't know what to do with it.

Mr Castelanos spoke of the differences in local situations, and social differences that make us vulnerable, saying that we talk little about the capacities that exist, and need to look at the hazard not only thinking of vulnerabilities but capacities, institutional and community. There is a high density of built up concrete areas and a lack of green areas and green public spaces, a lot of areas where heat accumulates and air pollution, needing to look at urban risk and development in association with the climate, as there is an effect of heat islands in urban communities. Coastal zones and river deltas and local communities are affected by shocks related to climate change. **Geological conditions such as unstable soils or earthquake risks are important to note, people live in such places, and legislation has to take into consideration the risk.** The interdependence is crucial especially when it comes to water, electricity, public transport, role of social services and police in urban areas, preventing cascading effects, as one system being affected can create a chain reaction leading to severe consequences as the effects are amplified and minor shocks and stresses can become a major crisis. Taking the example of the earthquake in Turkey, he spoke of the need for a multi-sectoral response to crises, and the need to learn from Turkey that the interconnectedness and preparedness of the population is of crucial importance. The Red cross in Turkey distributed 4-5 million meals every day, strong organisation and coordination are necessary for that, as well as professional supervision. He said that technology plays a tremendous role to make sure populations have access to relevant information.

He agreed about the need to listen to communities and what they want. The IRC did this in Turkey, understanding the need for interconnectedness for good resilience.

He spoke of people living in unsanitary living conditions and cramped spaces increasing the risk for epidemics and physical-mental health, creating more stress and violence, increasing risk, exposing more people to systemic risk which is linked to weak governance and policing, unequal access to opportunities, and is a critical condition for community cooperation. He stated that **we need to look at systemic risk from the social point of view, as poverty and social tensions are a recipe for violence and crime, warning about the high concentration of population being created with people moving from the villages and disrupting city resilience.** He noted that key points of resilience can be found around vulnerabilities, whereas urban populations rely on infrastructure and provision of services that they have little or no control over unlike rural communities that have their own land. This dependency on systems to provide for basic needs makes them vulnerable, also depending on socio-economic status. High vulnerability comes from poverty and living in slums as well. If we didn't have institutions with the capacity to manage the waste in the city, epidemics would happen, systems and services need to be functional and operable to reduce vulnerability, adding that we need social security and stability and employment to make people less vulnerable to external shocks. Many of those risks and vulnerabilities are known by their own communities, they know how to cope, risk managers need to look from the bottom up, to connect with local authorities. Ending with a comment on Ukraine, he said that he met with the deputy prime minister and talked about reconstruction and resilience building in Ukraine, and the need to focus not just on the conflict but economically empower communities in order to create resilience in the middle of a crisis, and build it at the start of a crisis, not at the end.

Dr. Rubens commented that empowerment needs community engagement, local ownership, and using the on the ground resources and knowledge. He said that when people think of Urban resilience they think of a metropolis in the global north, they don't think about slums or traffic jams. He added that cities have outgrown their capabilities, as people have moved to the cities to make their fortune, turning them into centres of innovation and exploration, but now cities are failing, their infrastructure is too old and under-invested in. He asked the panellists what to do to achieve influence, impact and legacy, and needing the structure and methodology to do that.

Sheela stated that Covid made her realise that the new globalisation is the millions of local arrangements, where if you have a clarity of what the local solution is, whatever works for one community is available to another. She said that far we didn't help much for the poor, talking about how she worked with the poorest people, giving the shattering statistic in Asia, where **the vast majority of people are living informally, invisibly, and illegally create their own homes, while global institutions aren't helping them in any way.** She asked, can we create powerful local resilience mechanisms that poor people can afford. ?

Dr. Rubens spoke of how he spent 2.5 years in Nigeria, which has a lot of super rich people but most people have less than a dollar a day, with which Ms. Patel agreed as in India it is similar. He added that London is always 5 minutes away from collapse, is fragile and brittle, and Londoners are to retrofit a 19th century city.

Lord Harris noted that an important thing to say is that **there is no one size fits all model**, what might work in London may not work in Nairobi or Kiev, but the principles are common, and the principle is to build something that is cohesive, whatever base you start from you want to move in the same direction, requires all the efforts for social cohesion, which isn't easy and is context dependent, but that's one of the objectives, to try and build sustainability in your environment.

When you try to run your city there are certain factors to bear in mind and to try to build balance, you might not have all the resources so when you allocate them do them in an equitable and fair way, balance growth and environmental sustainability. Cities are not a unified thing, London is made up of 32 boroughs, each of which has a myriad of communities. He spoke of how he represented thousands of electors with multiple communities, this being true at every level at every city, making them incredibly complicated, but that you must have vision to keep everything balanced.

Jaroslav Romanschuk added that no matter what the problems are, one thing we all agree on is that **to think about urban development and fighting poverty, there must be peace and predictability so that people are not frozen in an atmosphere of uncertainty**, saying that peace is a prerequisite for development in Ukraine and elsewhere. He said that thinking about the post-victory reconstruction, in Ukraine they want to rely on the experience of the success stories, which are about decentralised cities, sharing a historical example that in the Middle ages cities had Magdeburg rights, and each city had its own law of government. He argued that it's a good idea to modernise that idea, letting cities arrange their lives how they want and share the best of their experiences.

Dr. Rubens referenced that the ISRM is about creating a community of practitioners and academics who can create influence together, and this program is about thought and action leadership, creating realistic and realisable policies, referencing the work of Mr. Castellanos Xavier who everyday has to ask himself how to help 160 million people, to give them food and water.

Mr. Castellanos highlighted the key features, which are to have local organisation, to have a lot of local actors that are doing a great job. To prepare for urban disasters like in Ukraine, it is necessary to build clusters of coordination that integrate government, the private sector and humanitarian organisations instead of working in isolation. He added that technology plays a major role for the quality of the response, and that these sectors must be interconnected. The key element of resilience is individual resilience, but also institutional and community resilience. He noted that there are 3 elements to focus on here, humanitarian access, humanitarian space to operate, sustainability of humanitarian action, and looking at Ukraine he mentioned that the IFRC supported 14 million of its people, 6.5 of them outside of the country, with 5 000 local offices giving services all the time and contributing to the alleviation of the stress communities are having in Ukraine.

Dr Rubens summarised the meeting by urging everyone to: **“Think globally, Act locally”**, saying that we need progressive policies that have a radical impact on people's lives. He asked rhetorically: How do we create urban environments that are resilient that we can live in securely, how to respond and react to natural disasters or tech-infrastructure collapse, a pandemic or a war? At the end he expressed the hope that everyone will take something away from this, and that maybe together we can make a difference.



ABOUT

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ABOUT

## THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF WICKED PROBLEMS

The Centre for the Study of Wicked Problems (CSWP) is an international think-tank dedicated to facilitating effective research, analysis and solutions to the wicked problems faced by our organisations, governments and communities. The Centre brings together stakeholders, academics, policymakers and practitioners with one common platform to develop effective frameworks and strategies to address multifaceted challenges.

In creating a common global platform, the CSWP is a committed to facilitating a multidisciplinary approach, recognizing that the complexity of wicked problems requires bringing multiple different perspectives and expertise to the table.

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