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Re-thinking Cities in the Context of COVID at the Beijing Forum on Ecological Civilization and High-Quality Urbanization

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The Peking University — Lincoln Institute Center for Urban Development and Land Policy (PLC) co-hosted a sub-forum of the Beijing Forum, on the main theme of ecological civilization and high-quality urbanization, on November 6 Beijing Time.

The Beijing Forum is an annual international academic event co-sponsored by Peking University, Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, and Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies.

Our world is rapidly urbanizing. By 2050, it is expected that 2.4 billion more people will move to cities and 70% of the world population will be urban. The level of urbanization in China is now over 60% and will continue to rise for the next 20 years. Cities generate tremendous benefits to humankind, with higher productivity, better quality of life, more innovations, and more personal development opportunities. However, rapid urban expansion takes land and water bodies, and invades and weakens ecological systems. Cities are also facing the threats of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting us to re-think our mode of urbanization. In order to cope with the conflicts between urbanization and ecological protection, the Chinese government has recently accorded a top priority to the construction of ecological civilization, and formulated strategies to promote high-quality urbanization and encourage nature conservation and ecological restoration. Ecological civilization is a vision for human activities that the socioeconomic development today should not deplete ecological resources for the future generations and should generate more ecological capital for them. The construction of ecological civilization will be a long process requiring the effort of several generations in academic inquiries and evidence-based practices. It is a major challenge for us to find ways to achieve our vision of high-quality urbanization and ecological protection under the conceptual framework of ecological civilization.

The sub-forum was chaired by Professor Canfei He, Dean of the School of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University and Dr. Zhi Liu, Director of PLC. The sub-forum featured the keynotes of five distinguished scholars on important topics relating to the main theme, including Lessons from Nature for an Urban, Eco-Civilization by Prof. Ruth DeFries, Columbia University; Eco-Civilization: China's Ecosystem Restoration and Management by Prof. Bojie Fu, China Academy of Sciences; Harnessing the Data Revolution and 4th Industrial Revolution for Sustainable and Prosperous Cities by Prof. Sanjeev Khagram, Arizona State University; Healthy Cities, Planetary Health and Eco-civilization by Prof. Peng Gong, Tsinghua University; and China's Transition toward a Green and Low Carbon Economy by Prof. Jintao Xu, Peking University.

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