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Local Authorities Statement

Delivered by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

We are talking to the United *Nations* about how environmental sustainability on our planet can be ensured.

However, a single megacity such as Mumbai, India, has a population that is larger than the population of the 150 smaller UN member states each. But such cities don't have seat, voice and vote in multilateral governance.

It might be time to add United *Cities* to the global governance – indeed, as far as environmental and sustainable development matters are concerned, cities are more united than nations appear to be.

What's the relevance of cities¹ or “urban”?

- We are living on an increasingly “urban planet”
- Half of humanity lives in cities.
- Urbanization: The urban population grows by 75 million people every year. By 2050, it is expected to double, and two thirds of humanity will then be living in towns and cities.
- Asian urban areas hold 40% of the population, but contribute 80% of the GDP
- East Asian urban populations produce 92% of the countries' welfare.
- Bangkok produces 38 percent of Thailand's GDP; Paris (France), Tokyo (Japan), Johannesburg (South Africa), Stockholm (Sweden), London (UK) produce 30% of their countries' GDP
- Cities emit 75% of energy-related CO₂
- By 2030, cities use 73% of world's energy; related emissions will reach 79% of the world's total emissions

Cities are the hubs of the global economy.

Cities and global sustainability

- The sustainability of the globe will be decided largely by how our cities perform.
- Cities, by virtue of their density, have a potential for eco-efficiency. However, efficiency gains are eaten up by resource-consuming and wasteful urban lifestyles.
- Cities are dependent on ecosystems services and especially resource input from outside (air, water, food...) and the capacity of surrounding eco-systems to absorb and process waste (air pollution, sewage, waste...).
- Being crowded together in cities, and with a shrinking natural resource base, decreased availability of freshwater, higher prices for energy, water, food, mineral resources etc., additional costs for adapting to climate change – in the event of acute shortage, disaster or other crisis, inhabitants of cities may find themselves caught in a trap.
- Civic unrest is to be expected if resources get scarce and only the rich keep access to resources: this calls for equitable access to scarce resources and thus for environmental justice.

¹ Cities is used synonymously to urban areas, metropolitan regions, towns, etc.

Transforming cities to become sustainable (= able to be sustained)

We facing an era of resource constraints. In order for cities to be able to be sustained (sustainable), they must be:

- Eco-efficient
- Resilient to disasters and climate change
- Just

Our message to the UN through UNEP is therefore:

1. The United Nations, through UNEP and UN-HABITAT, should engage with local government organizations on a new Sustainable Cities Initiative aimed at securing sustainable livelihoods for citizens by:
 - (a) securing eco-systems services for cities
 - (b) promoting a green urban economy
2. The United Nations should recognize cities as determinative of global environmental sustainability and local governments as key actors and allies in ensuring global sustainability.

The UN should strengthen the interface with local governments in order to advance its purposes and secure a timely implementation of Multilateral Environment Agreements. Opportunities include:

Concerning International Environmental Governance:

- Leap-frogging implementation by working with **Rapid Implementation groups of cities** for each Convention; local governments are able to implement internationally agreed goals on the ground much faster than national governments
- Embracing an **urban agenda in each UN Summit** by working with Local Government Organizations (LGOs) to embed a Cities Summit as an official component of each UN Summit
- Including **urban components in initiatives** such as Greening the Economy (“Green Urban Economy”); an existing example is UNEP’s Climate Neutral Network with its Climate Neutral Cities component.

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