

KEYNOTE SPEECH BY

**UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR CITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE
AND FORMER MAYOR OF NEW YORK**

H.E. MR. MICHAEL BLOOMBERG,

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Thank you, Ambassador Drobnjak.

It's great to be here with all of you. This week's integration session such is an important opportunity – and you couldn't have picked a better focus than urbanization, because cities are the key to so many of the challenges this council is focused on.

Cities provide economic opportunity for those in search of a better life, and their growth is a big reason for the drop in extreme poverty that we've seen around the world.

Cities foster freedom, tolerance, and equality – and they provide safe haven for those whose rights have been threatened, or who have experienced persecution.

For proof, just look out of the windows of this building.

Families from every corner of the globe live and work in this city side by side, free to pursue their

dreams, express their views, and follow their own traditions and beliefs.

Around the world, cities are centers of educational opportunity, technological innovation, and economic growth.

More than ever, cities are also crucial to environmental sustainability – and they're the key to confronting the greatest environmental threat facing the world today: climate change.

That's true for two main reasons:

First, because cities account for 75% of the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change.

And second, because mayors around the world have a range of executive powers they can use to reduce those emissions and adapt to risks that come with climate change.

They don't have to wait for national governments or a new global climate agreement to act. They

can take action today – and increasingly, they are.

The Secretary-General understands the powerful role cities can play in addressing this global challenge – and I'm glad to be working alongside him and his team in my role as Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change.

This work couldn't be more urgent.

Climate change is already damaging crops and disrupting commerce, and costing governments

billions they could be spending on infrastructure investment, social services, and economic development.

If we do nothing, these impacts will grow far worse in the years to come.

Some of the worst impacts will be felt in cities – especially the majority of large cities around the world that lie in coastal areas.

And of those cities, the ones that may suffer the worst losses are those in developing countries, where infrastructure is the weakest.

So cities must adapt to climate risks – and do what they can to reduce them.

But those actions can bring other benefits, too – because local investments in sustainability also help attract private investment, drive economic growth, improve public health, and raise standards

of living.

Those of us who were in Medellin, Colombia, at the UN's World Urban Forum last month saw a great example of this:

The cable car system that connects communities on the outskirts of the city to its business center.

For a long time those communities were cut off from the city center and the jobs and services it provides – and that contributed to unemployment and high crime.

Medellin's cable-car solution is integrating those communities and opening doors of opportunity –

in a way that also minimizes carbon emissions and air pollution.

Here in New York City, we saw first-hand how investments in sustainability can make cities healthier, more livable, more integrated, and more economically vibrant.

For instance, by eliminating the dirtiest heating oils from buildings, creating hundreds of acres of

new parks, and planting 800,000 new trees, we not only helped to reduce our carbon footprint by

19% in just 6 years – we also helped make New York's air cleaner than it's been in more than 50 years, one reason New Yorkers are living three years longer on average today than they were in 2001.

That's helped the city attract more residents – and create new jobs.

Other big cities that have invested in sustainability – from London to Lagos to Johannesburg – are

seeing similar benefits.

And cities of every size are taking steps to reduce emissions and become more resilient.

Sorsogon City in the Philippines, which has been hit hard by typhoons, has developed a comprehensive resiliency plan to protect residents from extreme weather.

And Maputo City, Mozambique recently launched a rapid urban air quality assessment to evaluate

emission levels in the city – a critical first step that allows it to locate the biggest sources of emissions.

Together, cities have emerged as the leading force for action on climate change.

They have the power to lead the charge – and they have the will.

They're making great progress – and sharing strategies to build on each other's successes.

These strategies are spreading in every direction – from less developed countries to wealthier ones, as well as the other way around.

The expansion of bus rapid transit is a great example. It was pioneered in Brazil in the 1960s, and

it has spread to cities like New York, Paris, and Guangzhou.

This sharing of ideas underlines how cities in every part of the world share many of the same challenges – not only climate change.

Their leaders share the same concerns, such as protecting people from crime, creating jobs, collecting garbage, and reducing traffic.

And that's another reason that cities can help the world's nations work together and find consensus on how to address the sustainable development issues you're discussing this week.

But cities cannot move forward alone on climate change. They have to work together with national and regional levels of government.

Some cities need greater financial support – or they need to be free to borrow money on their own, independent of national governments.

Other cities need more authority and autonomy to take action – or greater control over the areas

that contribute most to carbon emissions, like energy and infrastructure.

These factors vary from city to city and from country to country. But I encourage all national governments to consider ways to empower your cities to take climate action.

Those actions will save lives. They'll strengthen and protect national economies.

They'll make cities healthier and economically vibrant.

And together, they'll make a difference in the global fight against climate change.

Around the world, the most successful cities are those with strong, empowered local governments.

Those are the cities that are most effective at driving economic growth, fighting crime, and improving public health.

And they are the cities that are going to make the biggest difference in the battle against climate change.

Along with the Secretary General, I'm working to encourage national governments to set ambitious climate goals, by showing them how much their cities can contribute to those goals.

And I'm working with him to ensure that this September's Climate Summit here in New York is a great success.

I hope leaders from all of your national governments will attend –and help bring us closer to reaching a meaningful global climate agreement in 2015.

All of you can help lead the way – and your work will help make the world a better place for our children – and for all the generations to come.

Thank you for inviting me here today – and all the best for a successful week.