



STATEMENT BY

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WORLD CITIES DAY 2019

“Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations”

This year’s World Cities Day theme, *“Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations”*, focuses on how urban governance can be used to achieve sustainable development.

Urban consumption has important consequences for biodiversity especially when we consider that our cities are expanding rapidly, with urban areas having more than doubled since 1992. In fact, the next few decades will see the most rapid period of urban population growth in human history, as evidenced by the *Nature in the Urban Century* assessment report launched in Egypt last year at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 14) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

In 2000, urban areas comprised an estimated 2,9 billion people, rising to 4.0 billion by 2015. This is forecast to rise by an additional 1.2 billion residents by 2030. Critically, urban population growth together with economic development is forecast to expand urban areas by 1.2-1.4 million km² between 2000 and 2030.

This will have significant impacts for biodiversity. Estimates suggest that urban expansion will directly impact 290,000 km² of natural habitat during this 30-year period, or around 17 per cent of existing protected areas, with biodiversity impacts forecast to be most severe in the tropical moist forest biome where there are rapidly expanding urban areas, such as those along the Brazilian coast, in West Africa and South-East Asia. Approximately 500 large cities exist in so-called “biodiversity hotspots” alone.

For this reason, we must ensure that any urban expansion is sustainable. This can be achieved in several ways. For example, through densification, which improves eco-efficiency in the use of natural resources; smart mobility, such as bicycle lanes or public transportation using biofuels alongside or instead of fossil-fuel-powered cars to help reduce pollution and climate change impacts; educating urban consumers on



how they can reduce their environmental impacts; provide positive incentives for green business such as organic farming; and ensure the connectivity of green urban spaces as corridors which help conserve habitats and biodiversity. For guidance, cities can follow nature-based solutions such as those demonstrated by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability in their CitiesWithNature platform.

And cities are acting. For example, in Belgium, the area around the Port of Antwerp is one of the most important habitats for threatened species. Consequently, a species protection programme was launched in 2014 for the conservation of 90 protected species. The programme generated an ecological infrastructure consisting of 'core areas' (large green spaces with high ecological value), green corridors (long connecting zones) and 'stepping stones' (small green spaces that create connections between large green spaces that provide suitable habitat and breeding possibilities).

Singapore, a city in a garden which proposed a City Biodiversity Index to measure urban performance on this critical aspect, champions vertical greenery such as with the Oasia Hotel Downtown, 27 floors covered with 54 species of plants and trees, and the “Rain Vortex” waterfall” a 40-meter waterfall with all the water harvested from rain and then recirculated, at Singapore’s Changi Airport. And in 2018, officials in Cape Town, South Africa, announced that the city of 4 million people was running out of water. Faced with a potential “Day Zero”, the city’s contingency plan included increasing water restrictions, conserving and restoring wetlands and ecosystems, and optimizing water use for peri-urban agriculture. This eventually drove down water consumption by more than 50 per cent compared with pre-drought levels.

To help accelerate local and subnational action for biodiversity, the CBD collaborates with ICLEI, Regions4, the Group of Leading Subnational Governments, the European Committee of the Regions and many other networks. Summits of mayors and governors have also been held parallel with all meetings of the Conference of the Parties since 2007, as will be the case for COP 15 next October in Kunming, China. Furthermore, the CitiesWithNature initiative serves as the web-based rallying platform for cities to join the *Sharm El-Sheikh to Kunming Action Agenda for Nature and People*, which aims to collect, coordinate and celebrate actions in support of biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use.

A practical shared vision for our cities and their biodiversity is more important now than ever before. As we move towards a new post-2020 global biodiversity framework, there is also a need to develop a framework for urban governance of biodiversity. In this era of rapid urbanisation, human population growth and climate change, managing our cities and their relations with nature may be the most successful way to navigate these transitions in order to exist in harmony with nature.
