

Speech at the ICLEI World Congress Closing Ceremony by ICLEI President Ashok Sridharan, Mayor of Bonn

delivered at the ICLEI World Congress, Montréal, Canada, 22 June 2018

Mayor Plante, Secretary General Van Begin, Governors, Mayors, esteemed Participants,

First, let me thank you, Mayor Plante, for your inspiring words and for the tremendous hospitality of your wonderful city and the amazing people!

I myself come from a region where appreciation is expressed with more than words. So – please- may I ask all of you to join me in a round of big applause to thank our hosts.

In the past four days, we, Mayors and leaders, have been away from our desks and at quite a distance from our communities. Our normal schedules waived, our minds free to think strategically, enabled us to consider and discuss new perspectives for action on the ground. For me and my colleagues in the ICLEI presidium and Council, this has been a wonderful opportunity to interact, to get acquainted with members and to discuss all the dynamic work taking place around the world.

I'm happy and proud that ICLEI now has a gender-balanced presidium. And, if I may add, Cathy Oke, Stephany Uy-Tan and Frank Cownie make up an amazing presidium-team!

As Cathy has said, “as city leaders, it is up to us to make sure that the diversity across our communities and administrations is a source of strength and innovation that shapes every step we take.” Our presidium reflects this shared belief by our community.

Together, we will act on the message at the heart of the ICLEI Montreal Commitment and Strategic Vision – sustainability goes hand in hand with inclusivity. Fundamentally, this commitment is about ensuring a sustainable urban world for all.

This commitment will guide us as we tackle both the challenges and opportunities before cities and regions.

In our Council meeting and in leadership plenaries and sessions, we considered how best to advance along the five pathways laid out in this commitment. These pathways facilitate low emission, resilient, circular, nature-based and human-centered development to create systemic change in this new urban era.

The ICLEI Montreal Commitment and Strategic Vision is already in motion. Through our ICLEI Montreal Action Plan, our ICLEI Offices will undertake in the next 3 years more than 130 funded actions and initiatives involving over 3500 hundred cities and regions. These activities, taking place around the world, capture the richness and the diversity of local and regional action.

A number of these have been highlighted during this World Congress:

from the Urban Transitions Alliance and Front Line Cities and Islands, to initiatives on sustainable procurement and food systems.

The World Congress is a platform for us to demonstrate action and advance dialogue that drive global agendas forward. I recall the announcement of much needed, forward-thinking initiatives that prepare us to lead conversations before our global community this year.

We had the pleasure of launching our new CitiesWithNature platform with our cities and partner organisations here on Wednesday - what a fantastic new initiative which now allows all our cities - large and small - to connect, share, learn and raise our collective ambition to connect with the nature around us and plan our urban future WITH nature.

We are all part of nature. For the well-being of our planet and our people, it is vital that we nurture and restore our rich biodiversity and ecosystems. We welcome all of you to join our exciting and innovative new "CitiesWithNature" initiative!

ICLEI has also called upon our members to aim for climate neutrality before mid-century. This is ambitious! Yet, cities of any size and in any part of the world can make this happen in government infrastructure and operations. This is essential to delivering the Paris Agreement. Aiming for climate neutrality is how we will step up ahead of the Global Climate Action Summit and encourage our national counterparts to join us.

ICLEI also endorsed the Edmonton Declaration, doing our part to demonstrate the need for scientific evidence and practitioner expertise to inform effective policy. By endorsing the declaration as a network, we put the global research agenda on cities and climate front and center.

Together, the activities in the ICLEI Montreal Action Plan will help us deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. We will use SDG eleven on cities, as the central lever to advance all seventeen goals.

I want to announce that as President of ICLEI, I am taking the ICLEI Montréal Commitment home to Bonn and adopting it as our guiding vision. I invite all city and regional leaders across the ICLEI network to do the same, making sustainability a fundamental and lasting part of all urban development across the world. The sum of our efforts, actions and policies will be a catalyst for the global change that humanity needs in this urban century.

At this point, I would like to close with my appreciation, not only for the teams of our hosts in Montréal, but above all, for YOU – the amazing membership of ICLEI, who bring a vibrancy to convenings like this every time we meet.

Thank you. I hope you enjoy our remaining time together today, and celebrate our shared accomplishments.