

Ralf Fücks - Opening Speech
Forum on Sustainable Cities
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Welcome to Sao Paulo, welcome to day one of the Global Greens Congress, and welcome to our Forum on Sustainable Cities.

Seven years after the first Global Greens gathering in Canberra, Australia, this will be another great opportunity to exchange experiences, share our visions and coordinate our activities. In the last years, the number of green parties, members of parliament and elected officials has increased impressively. But even more important than that: our ideas, our concerns and our tasks have spread widely to the public, the media and even to the business world. I hesitate to say that Green is going mainstream, because there is a lot of lip service and green window dressing, but definitively we are no longer a small minority fighting to get attention for our concerns and aspirations. With a little help from the IPCC, the scientific community, from thousands of non-governmental organisations and a lot of engaged journalists, issues like climate change, energy efficiency, promoting renewable energies and greening the economy have captured the very centre of the political arena.

We must no longer focus on ringing the alarm bell.

We now must reach out to gain support for decisive action and build broad alliances for ecological and social innovation.

Why do we start this meeting with a session on Sustainable Cities? At first, because most of us like to live in cities: they are the centre stage of democracy, and if you're looking for personal self-determination, tolerance, a vibrant cultural life, political action and a cosmopolitan lifestyle, you usually will find it in big cities. Cities throughout human history have been pioneers for human development in all its dimensions. But only the 21st century will be the first truly urban century.

Today, more than 50% of the world's population live in cities. By 2025 this figure will reach 60%. While New York and Tokyo were the only cities with more than 10 million inhabitants in 1950, today there are more than 20 mega cities, most of them in the southern hemisphere. Such a rapid and widely unregulated urbanisation causes serious social dislocation and ecological problems. But it could also provide the opportunity for a better future. Towns and cities are consuming roughly 80% of global resources and generate the bulk of the world's CO2 emissions. They are one of the main sources of our planet's ecological crisis.

At the same time, social fragmentation and a widening gap between obscene luxury and unbearable poverty are threatening the coherence of many cities. It has been estimated that one third of the

world's urban dwellers live in areas where people cannot secure key necessities such as clean water, sanitation or durable housing – an alarming indication of growing social inequality. At the same time, cities are the cradle of democracy, attracting talents and entrepreneurs, they are laboratories for social and economic innovations, and many of them are showcases for peaceful interaction between citizens of different origin, religion and lifestyle. If cities can't make it, the world can't make it.

Cities must be at the cutting edge of sustainable development.

With all their scientific, cultural, economic resources, cities have the potential to play a key role in the battle against climate change. The Utopian view of zero emission cities is possible. At the same time, cities must promote the social integration and political participation of all their inhabitants. Without improving the conditions of the poor and involving all citizens in future developments, there will be no solution to the crisis.

Improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energies as an alternative to oil, coal and nukes, limiting car traffic and improving public transport, providing access to education, health care, clean water and sanitation to all citizens are key elements for a sustainable future of cities.

Cities need to free themselves from reliance on fossil fuels and atomic energy and drastically reduce their energy requirements. This can only be achieved through substantial incentives to save energy, make transport and buildings more energy efficient and promote alternative energy sources. Modern technology and better insulation alone can reduce heating and cooling energy consumption by at least 50%. The cost of investment to do this can be recouped in a relatively short time by reduced energy bills. Zero emissions buildings, water recycling systems, urban permaculture and vertical greenhouses should be promoted as pilot projects. As a welcome side effect the insulation of buildings, the installation of solar panels and water conservation systems will provide a steady increase in local employment opportunities.

Forward-looking urban policies require traffic reduction measures that integrate housing, employment and recreation in decentralised areas. Governments must provide affordable, safe and efficient public transport. Strict emission levels for vehicles, car tolls, traffic reduced areas, car free Sundays should be introduced to reduce the number of cars which are flooding our cities. Regulating and limiting car traffic defends the public space of the city and improves the quality of urban life.

Taken together these measures can reduce the individual CO₂ emissions of city dwellers by at least 50% by the middle of the century. Given the uneven proportion of emissions, cities in high industrialised countries have to go beyond that goal, reducing their emissions by 80-90 percent. This will be a major contribution to stabilise the global climate.

For cities to be sustainable local democracy needs to be revitalised.

This requires transparent government as well as consultation procedures that involve all the population in public affairs. Representative local elections should be supplemented by decentralised participation structures like school boards or neighbourhood councils. In particular, those with lower incomes need a stronger say in local policy to protect their interests. In many places grassroots organisations have provided innovative solutions to pressing urban problems. A good example can be found in Brazil where citizens have been successfully involved in the making of the public budget.

As well as municipal and civil society, business also has a central role in promoting sustainable development. Stabilising the world's climate requires nothing less than a new industrial revolution. In this context, towns and cities, with their potential for innovation, their combination of research institutions, businesses and qualified labour force, have an important role to play. In particular the promotion of small and medium enterprises is of great importance for urban finances and local employment. We therefore encourage partnerships between civil society, public authorities and local employers. Making use of their purchasing power, city administrations should care for ecological procurement in all sectors where the city exerts demand.

Many local authorities have already started down the path to an improved social and ecological future, in many cases surpassing their national governments. Some 6400 Agenda 21 initiatives in more than 100 countries as well as successful networks such as the Climate Alliance demonstrate the dynamism of this process. Let me give you an example.

Usually the United States are widely and rightly recognised as environmental trouble maker rather than a trouble shooter. But in fact, more and more cities in North America are going green. Over 300 cities, home to more than 50 million Americans, have joined the "Mayors Climate Protection Agreement", committing to reducing their emissions and lobbying the Federal Government for an ambitious national climate policy. So, finally, in spite of all the problems and challenges cities are facing today, hope is on the way. The future of cities will be green