



COMMUNIQUÉ

2019 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Planners call for better integrating urban planning practices in strategies to achieve SDG 13 and effectively combat climate change and its impact.

New York, 9 July 2019

As the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development opens, the community of urban and regional planners under the umbrella of Planners for Climate Action (P4CA)¹ wishes to convey its views on the implementation of SDG 13: *Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact.*

We welcome the Report of the Secretary General on *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*² that highlights progress over the past four years with regard to all Sustainable Development Goals. The report highlights the rising greenhouse gas emissions and the fact that *climate change is occurring at rates much faster than anticipated and its effects are clearly felt worldwide.* It notes that *in 2017 greenhouse gas concentrations reached new highs, with globally averaged mole fractions of CO₂ at 405.5 parts per million (ppm), up from 400.1 ppm in 2015, and at 146 per cent of pre-industrial levels. Moving towards 2030 emission E/2019/68 19-07404 19/39 objectives compatible with the 2°C and 1.5°C pathways requires a peak to be achieved as soon as possible, followed by rapid reductions.* Also, it points to direct economic losses from disasters estimated at almost \$3 trillion and climate-related and geophysical disasters to have claimed an estimated 1.3 million lives between 1998 and 2017. We acknowledge the trends reported by the Secretary General and concur on the urgency of climate action that calls for bolder mitigation and adaptation strategies in which we can play a critical role as urban and regional planners.

We also take note of the Report of the Secretary-General on *Long-term impact of current trends in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals*³. The report points to mega-trends, in particular to urbanization and climate change and examine to what extent they will allow realizing the SDGs considering the complexity and interrelated nature of the SDGs. We welcome the report that calls for revisiting approaches to planning and policy making in various sectors with a focus on urbanization and climate change. In particular it says: *As the world continues to urbanize, sustainable development depends increasingly on the successful management of urban growth, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected between now and 2050.* It recommends several action areas, in particular: *Land-use and planning need to be part of actions in areas of transport, energy, emergency preparedness, and related fiscal and funding solutions. Well-*

¹ P4CA is a cooperative initiative registered under the [UN Environment Climate Initiatives Platform](#) and the [Global Climate Action Non-State Actors Zone](#) (NAZCA) placed under the UNFCCC Marrakesh Partnership.

² Special edition: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals - Report of the Secretary-General 2019, Session 26 July 2018–24 July 2019 - Agenda items 5 (a) and 6 [[E/2019/68](#)]

³ Long-term impact of current trends in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals - Report of the Secretary-General, 2019 Session, 27 July 2018 - 26 July 2019 Agenda item 5 (b) [[E/2019/XX](#) Advanced version]

managed urbanization, informed by an understanding of population trends over the long run offers unique chances to protect and improve the urban ecosystem and environmental services, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and promote disaster risk reduction and management.

The Secretary General's Report also notes that *extreme climate-related disasters have doubled since early 1990, averaging 213 events every year between 1990–2016 and that the poor and vulnerable social groups in developing countries are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change.* It also says that *developing countries will require large-scale investment to build resilient infrastructure, expand safety nets and adopt new climate-smart technologies.* The key implications for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are among others: *limiting global warming to 1.5°C rather than 2°C above preindustrial levels that would make it markedly easier to achieve many aspects of sustainable development, with greater potential to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities. Impacts avoided with the lower temperature limit could reduce the number of people exposed to climate risks and vulnerable to poverty by 62 to 457 million. (...) It would also make it easier to achieve certain SDGs, in particular those that relate to poverty, hunger, health, water and sanitation, cities and ecosystems (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, 14 and 15).*

We agree that, as mentioned in the report, *the cost of inaction is much higher than the investments needed to tackle climate change and environmental degradation and that a wide variety of options are available to reduce the risks, ranging from lowering energy consumption and focusing on sustainable sources, decarbonization policies, reforestation or afforestation, sustainable agriculture and waste management to reduce methane emissions, retrofitting of buildings.*

However, the report does not specifically consider the fundamental role of urban planning and design and the fact that countries and cities are still poorly equipped with required tools to better plan urban development taking climate change into account. It also dismisses the fact that National Governments often fail to support regional and local governments in order to effectively address climate changes both in terms of mitigation and adaptation. Cities and regions need to be engaged in decisive urban planning and design in order to mitigate their GHG emissions together with spatial adaptation strategies and prepare urban communities to the negative impacts of climate change. Inclusive planning approaches are needed in order to address the most impacted by climate changes, the urban poor and other vulnerable groups. Cities and their partners also need to stimulate behavior changes in order to strengthen climate resilience through awareness-raising.

We also concur with the views of major groups and other stakeholders on SDG13 conveyed in the discussion paper⁴ on the theme of the HLPF, in particular from the Non-Governmental organizations which called Member States to: *align actions with the Paris Agreement; adopt disaster risk-informed planning that includes all stakeholders, especially those most vulnerable to climate risks; empower local communities to strengthen their own resilience; place long-term resilience at the core of disaster preparedness and response actions; prioritize ecologically sustainable practices; and act with urgency on climate change impacts already affecting lives and ecosystems, engaging multilateral cooperation and cross-sector collaboration.*

Planners are key players in addressing SDG13 and take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact. The role of urban and regional planners and plans in addressing climate change has been made explicit in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Planners are critical in preparing and implementing strategies and plans to scale-up climate action.

⁴ Discussion papers on the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, submitted by major groups and other stakeholders - Agenda item 2 [[E/HLPF/2019/2](#)]

We reaffirm our commitments to support sustainable pathways towards addressing climate change, in particular:

- **Develop and apply urban and regional planning approaches** to address climate related hazards by integrating hazard risk reduction, location of infrastructure and basic services, improving informal settlements, density, safety, green and public spaces, preservation of heritage and local culture, and encouraging the adaptation and reuse of existing structures rather than their replacement.
- **Help ensure that all cities** incorporate ambitious mitigation and adaptation actions into their plans and spatial development policies. In particular, support cities to adopt climate responsive planning and design and align their climate policies and actions with poverty reduction measures. *For example, compact urban development patterns, both historic and newly planned, can make public transportation more viable, leading to reduced greenhouse gas emissions; meanwhile in the long-term land use controls can profoundly affect the exposure of vulnerable populations to climate-related natural hazards such as flooding and landslides.*
- **Help national governments** to achieve their mitigation and adaptation targets and plans through policy frameworks that enable local community-based action, improved multi-level governance, and transformative planning approaches.
- **Build the capacity of all planners** and ensure that all university-level urban/regional planning curricula prepare future professionals to plan for effective climate action
- **Support research** that can help strengthen knowledge on the impact of planning practices, mitigation and adaptation actions, models and tools for climate action in order to prevent negative side-effects of mitigation and adaptation policies and options on the urban poor.
- **Enhance networking** that can strengthen the science and expertise among academia and practitioners for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Through the above commitments, **we take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts and address the three targets** defined under SDG13: 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries; 13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

We would like to add our voice to the next steps of the implementation of SDG13. We advocate for a stronger role given to urban and regional planners in order to make faster progress to combat climate change. We believe that important decisions made while planning cities and territories are fundamental to decarbonization and resilience towards sustainable cities and communities. Without urban and planning, decision-makers might fail to properly address the critical challenges of climate change for the next generations.

About P4CA

Planners for Climate Action (P4CA) is a global collaboration to promote the value of better and sustainable planning to cities facing the impacts of climate change. It registered under the [UN Environment Climate Initiatives Platform](#) and the [Global Climate Action Non-State Actors Zone \(NAZCA\)](#) as a cooperative initiative under the UNFCCC Marrakesh Partnership.

P4CA is convened by [UN-Habitat](#), the lead agency within the UN system for coordinating activities in the field of human settlement development. UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind.