

Remarks by Ms. Penny Abeywardena, NYC Commissioner for International Affairs
Review of the Implementation of SDG 11
UN Conference Room 4
Wednesday, July 11, 3:00 – 6:00

Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of Mayor Bill de Blasio, I would like to welcome you all to the City of New York for the High-Level Political Forum. I am honored to be here to represent the City of New York and participate in today's discussion about SDG 11, and the critical role of cities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Although the SDGs are national commitments, we know that more than half of the world's population now live in urban centers, and cities have proven to be essential partners in ensuring that the goals are achieved. New York City is a thriving global city with over 8.6 million residents and proud host to the United Nations.

The New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs is uniquely positioned to help achieve the SDGs by amplifying, sharing, and learning from policies and best practices from cities and national governments from around the world. I hope that by sharing New York City's practical expertise and experience in taking local ownership of the SDGs, we can make a meaningful contribution to the implementation of SDG 11 as well as the overall 2030 Agenda.

Today, we are thrilled to become the first city in the world to submit a Voluntary Local Review directly to the United Nations. To mark this occasion, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio has issued a Mayoral Proclamation declaring today, July 11, Global Goals day.

The Voluntary Local Review is part of our ongoing efforts since 2015 to highlight the synergies between the SDGs and OneNYC, our local sustainable development strategy. By sharing the review on local work toward the SDGs, the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs also continues its advocacy for city perspectives at the UN.

This includes our recent efforts to influence the ongoing negotiations around the global agreement on migration by organizing a coalition of 50 cities in North America, South America, Europe, and Africa. The collective partnership among cities, subnational stakeholders, and local leaders continues to grow and strengthen our approaches to achieving the targets of the SDGs for a more equitable and inclusive future.

First, I'd like to provide some background on OneNYC, Mayor de Blasio's strategy to build a stronger and more just city for all New Yorkers. In April 2015, NYC committed to the principles of growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency through its groundbreaking OneNYC strategy which is a model for sustainable development at the local level. The consultative process to develop OneNYC, which began in late 2014, involved 71 New York City agencies, and included New York residents and businesses as well as an advisory board comprised of civic leaders, policy specialists, and community leaders.

The principle of leaving no one behind is central to OneNYC. To truly achieve our aspirations, New York City focuses its efforts on interagency coordination and inclusion to ensure that all who wish to participate and contribute are given an opportunity. The explicit inclusion of equity in OneNYC is critical, because a widening opportunity gap threatens the city's future.

Accountability is also a crucial aspect of OneNYC. To ensure accountability to New Yorkers, the principles laid out in OneNYC were defined in concrete terms through commitments, milestones, and metrics, and an annual progress report is published every year on Earth Day.

When world leaders committed to the SDGs in 2015, we recognized the synergies with OneNYC, and established the Global Vision | Urban Action program to use the common framework of the SDGs to learn from as well as share our city's innovations in sustainability with cities and countries across the globe.

Through the Global Vision | Urban Action program, we first mapped the links between OneNYC and the SDGs. Since then, we have been inviting NYC's diplomatic corps to visit our communities to see firsthand how NYC is implementing SDGs at the local level, and to discuss our shared challenges. We also bring City voices to the UN to infuse the local perspective into policy discussions about the implementation of the SDGs.

In preparation for the HLPF, we worked with NYC agencies to look at SDGs that are being addressed at this High-Level Political Forum, specifically SDG 6: Clean Water and sanitation, SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production, SDG 15: Protect life on land. Of course, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities was at the heart of all of our site visits.

Additionally, we convene events at the UN to provide a platform for sharing ideas among local, national, and international perspectives on issues ranging from mental health to gender equity to decent work and economic growth. These events proved to be an excellent opportunity to both strengthen implementation by sharing best practices and to build broader political support for achieving the SDGs.

We also know that youth engagement is key to achieving the SDGs in the long-term. Our NYC Junior Ambassadors program connects the work of the United Nations to students across NYC, empowering them to become global citizens.

Since 2015, the program has reached over 1,500 students and educators in more than 50 classrooms who are learning about topics ranging from climate change and gender equity to the refugee crisis, thinking critically about how to make a difference locally, and most importantly committing to actions in their own neighborhoods. .

While the 2030 Agenda is ambitious, OneNYC has shown progress is possible. In April 2018, Mayor de Blasio announced that we have made NYC's air and water cleaner, achieved record job and wage growth, and tripled the number of children accessing early education, among other accomplishments. We decided to share this progress with the global community by translating NYC's efforts to the SDG framework and submitting a Voluntary Local Review to the UN.

Modeled after the Voluntary National Review, we wrote the Voluntary Local Review in partnership with our sister NYC agencies: the Mayor's Offices of Operations, and Climate Policy and Programs, and other relevant agencies and focused on the five priority SDGs in order to provide detailed information not just about our progress, but the steps we are taking to achieve that progress, and we aim to submit a VLR annually.

Consistent with our objective to achieve the four visions of growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency, NYC is proud to present the world's first-ever Voluntary Local Review. As this afternoon's session highlights, there is strong recognition of the crucial role that cities play in achieving the SDGs.

NYC's VLR offers one example of how cities can share our progress. We welcome engagement with cities as well as other SDG stakeholders to strengthen these reporting mechanisms. By using the common language of the SDGs to discuss our shared successes and challenges, we know that communities and their governments around the world can work together to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030.