

United Nations High Level Political Forum  
“Review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation and interrelations among  
goals: Discussion on SDG 13 - Climate Action”  
UN Headquarters, New York  
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**Prepared Remarks of Penny Abeywardena, Commissioner, New York City Mayor's Office  
for International Affairs**

Thank you Mr. Sarmad.

Welcome to New York City! It's our honor to host the United Nations and for the next couple of days, the High-Level Political Forum. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the United Nations and the President of the ECOSOC—Ambassador King—for their continued partnership with the City of New York and their proactive engagement of local authorities as allies in the implementation of the SDGs.

Here in New York City, we have firsthand experience with the severe impact of climate change. Hurricane Sandy in 2012 killed dozens, caused an estimated 19 billion in damages and flooded close to 90,000 buildings. This is why we are leading efforts to mitigate current and future challenges.

The devastation of Superstorm Sandy made the threat of climate change clear for New Yorkers and reinforced the de Blasio administration's commitment to building a sustainable and equitable city. This commitment is reflected in the creation of OneNYC, the City's first-ever resiliency plan to prepare for the growing risks of climate change.

Launched in April 2015, One NYC demonstrates the fundamental link between climate action and inclusive growth by introducing an equity lens into the city's long-term planning.

Given the synergies between OneNYC targets and the SDGs, my office established the Global Vision | Urban Action platform to amplify NYC's efforts to achieve the Global Goals and to share our experiences beyond borders while learning from other cities and countries.

In June 2017, the de Blasio administration understood the importance of local authority leadership and signed an executive order committing New York City to the principles of the Paris Agreement, inspiring hundreds of cities around the country to do the same. We were joined by U.S. cities of all sizes and a few months later, we became the first city in the world to publish a plan to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

NYC is also focused on **climate responsibility and accountability**. We have announced our plan to divest **\$5 billion of our pension funds** from fossil fuels while holding the world's most powerful oil companies accountable for their contribution to dangerous global warming.

The City of New York has sued five of the world's biggest oil companies to hold them financially responsible for contributing to climate change. Despite the fact that a U.S. district

court judge dismissed the lawsuit, we have appealed that decision to the Second Circuit. We are continuing to pursue damages from the fossil fuel companies that have caused the climate crisis and are proud of setting a precedent for other cities and building a foundation for accountability that cities and states can pursue in the coming years. Mayor de Blasio and Mayor Khan of London also launched the International Fossil Fuel Divestment Partnership Network to share best practices and strategies with other cities considering divestment.

This is important because **we must achieve carbon neutrality**. We know that the transformation to carbon neutrality and climate resiliency will create new jobs and opportunities for New Yorkers. It requires innovation to find less expensive and more effective solutions; creative financing and financial investment; and partnerships across communities, sectors, geographies, and all levels of government. And to ensure the transition is just and equitable, we demand that the costs are borne by those most responsible for our climate crisis — and the benefits shared — so no community is left behind.

Inspired by local and global conversations and efforts, NYC took this work a step further by creating and submitting the Voluntary Local Review in July 2018. The Voluntary Local Review is a tool for cities to report directly to the United Nations on their progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Unfortunately, we continue to see attempts around the world and in our own country to roll back efforts to protect the planet. So in April, the de Blasio administration launched our Green New Deal, a plan called OneNYC 2050 that focuses on creating good-paying jobs—including green jobs; increasing climate and community resiliency; ensuring equitable access to nature, clean air and water; and healthy food while guaranteeing the right to quality health care and education in all communities across the five boroughs.

SDG icons are incorporated throughout OneNYC 2050 to demonstrate the continued link between local and global efforts.

We also understand that governments can't do this work alone and that our residents play an important role in reversing climate change and achieving all of the Global Goals— and our youth should be at the heart of this strategy. That is why my office launched the NYC Junior Ambassadors program to empower seventh graders to learn about the UN, the SDGs, and issues like climate change. These young people have harnessed this knowledge and used their power to mobilize their peers, families, and broad community to action.

In conclusion, our 2019 VLR, which will be published next week, reflects the critical developments that are in OneNYC 2050. Since NYC has committed to submitting a VLR every year, we focus on the five priority SDGs at the HLPF. This year, we are highlighting the critical work we are doing to address climate change, and showing how it is connected to the quality education, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

We hope that by sharing New York's innovations and challenges in sustainability outlined in the VLR, the five boroughs will continue to inspire other cities and countries around the world.

We encourage other local and regional governments to join us in doing Voluntary Local Reviews so that we can continue to learn from each other.

By taking action on these strategies, New York City is demonstrating not only the effectiveness of our model but also its necessity. Our nation and indeed our planet deserve nothing less if we hope to secure a livable future for humanity.

Together, we can build a brighter, greener, more equitable, and sustainable future for all.