

High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization

Yangzhou, 16-18 December 2013

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Closing remarks, 18 Dec 2013

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I take the floor at the closing of the Yangzhou Symposium.

I thank our hosts, the Municipal Government of Yangzhou, for their generous hospitality, and for providing the best possible setting for our discussions. And for the large team of dedicated staff from Yangzhou that has made our stay here an absolute delight.

Together with the hard work of our moderators and presenters everyone has contributed to the success of this event.

I hope we will have more opportunities to meet in Yangzhou in the future.

Our discussions have been varied, enlightening and substantive.

They have illustrated the truly cross cutting nature of policy planning and implementation for sustainable cities and urbanisation in the context of sustainable development.

It is clear to me that indeed our cities are where the battle for a sustainable future will take place. It is a battle we must win for there is no plan B.

The magnitude of the problem, especially in the developing world is frightening. The urgency of action compels us to act now.

The symposium has generated important recommendations some of which has just been presented. We will gather and further develop the outcome into a guidance document to support national and local decision-makers and other stakeholders in further developing sustainable cities and urbanization.

We are grateful to you for having shared your insights and experiences, your good advice, tools and approaches taken to overcome the challenges at hand. I am also grateful for the important contributions of our UN-system partners, with whom we will continue to work closely in the follow-up.

Some messages that I take away from our meeting is that cities is so much more than just infrastructure, houses, roads and shops. That the solution to problems must define the scale and regional boundaries for defining appropriate actions. That we must utilize space efficiently so that future generations are able to tackle the challenges of their times.

That while many cities already struggle to make the transition to sustainability, there are already many tools and guidance in place to help us along.

Cities are like ecosystems that need to support human life and human development while respecting planetary boundaries. They must be adaptable and human centered while promoting cohesion and priorities of its citizens.

Our policies must address the needs and aspirations of all peoples, whether regarding access to public services, participation in public life, cultural events, education, health services, or employment.

Cities must also be adaptable as our demographics change, be dynamic and future oriented.

And we must not forget that rural development is intricately linked to urban development. These urban-rural dynamics are essential to our national sustainable development, as there is no successful urbanization without the improvement of the rural conditions.

Lastly, I have noted that while our gathering here represents a wide range of cities and urbanization processes, we have far more in common than differences.

We share many experiences and therefore also possible solutions and best practices from which we can benefit moving forward.

There are certainly many more messages from our discussions and we shall do our best to capture them in the proceedings of the Symposium.

It is my hope that our gathering here in Yangzhou will form the foundation for continued collaboration among national and local governments, city managers and other stakeholders.

It was fortunate that we had this symposium in Yangzhou, one of the most sustainable cities in China, where the local leadership is inspired and inspiring. We have learned from each other and from the City of Yangzhou. This is the spirit of partnership and learning encouraged by Rio+20.

One of the speakers stressed principles of sustainable urbanization – including the holding of world class events. I am glad we were part of this symposium, which is a world class event in Yangzhou.

As we advance in defining a set of Sustainable Development Goals, symposia such as the one here, are steps in a better understanding of the appropriate goals and targets for cities.

In this light I am also very pleased with the initiative by the City of Bogota to convene a High-level Dialogue on Sustainable Cities, Transport and Tourism in 2014 and we will do our best to support your efforts. I sincerely hope that other cities will follow suit and continue to bring focus on the issues of sustainable city development and sustainable urbanization.

Thank you again for coming to Yangzhou. I wish you safe travels back to your home cities.