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**At the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe**

**Agenda item 2: High-level dialogue**

Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the Paris Climate Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development we have to global frameworks in response to the challenge of climate change, shrinking environmental resources and the destruction of ecosystems.

In case we are taking the goals formulated in these agreements seriously, which we should, our societies will have to go through a massive transformation in three areas

- Technological transformation
- Socio-cultural transformation
- Socio-economic transformation

As a fourth area we also could mention governance.

Globally we see a trend towards further urbanization that is also continuing in Europe, where already a tangible majority of the people is living in cities and urban areas (EU +75%). Still we also see a difference between Western Europe and Eastern Europe where the grade of urbanization is lower as well as the GDP. The trend towards urbanisation is further supported by the digitalization, new economy and the concentration of services, know-how, creativity and capital. We also see the strive of cities to become more attractive as living space and to enhance the quality of life, as part of their own competitive agenda.

Both, because of the concentration of people, business and capital, cities are a key partner for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and the achievement of its goals. Cities are the administrative and political level closest to citizens and people, who can become more motivated to take part in shaping their immediate surrounding than getting engaged in more abstract and distant issues. Through the concentration of knowledge and creativity, cities are hubs of innovation both technological and social and are test beds for new approaches like shared mobility or new vehicles like e-scooters and many more. With the transition to renewable energy, also energy supply will become more decentralized both in production, consumption and economic organization.

However, new technologies and the mobility of people also provides cities with considerable challenges. International and globalised streams of capital, goods and people run through the city and are using the city as a 'user interface' while the cities are not able to capture income from these value streams. Also different communities

of temporary and permanent residents are developing, and are in potential conflict because of different interest and cultures, particularly concerning ownership and responsibility for the development of the city.

Still, there is an increasing number of cities that is successfully working to tackle these challenges and is particularly ambitious on climate change and resource efficiency, while at the same time protecting and enhancing the quality of life of its people. By that they are also creating a positive environment for a solid economic development.

Examples are Oslo, Malmö, Copenhagen, Milan, Barcelona, Ljubljana, and even though many cities in Eastern Europe are still facing different challenges there are also rising stars like Tirana or Tbilisi.

We at ICLEI work with many of those cities based on the five pathways that you see on the slide which are again touching to the three resp. four areas of transformation that I have addressed earlier. Ideally we address all pathways when tackling specific issues in a city or urban region. Four ICLEIs work in Europe we connect these pathways to our key working areas in an integrated approach.

Of course, Cities can do a lot but at the same time they cannot do it on their own. They need supportive legal and regulatory frameworks that support sustainable approaches, and they need the delegation of power, responsibility and resources since they are lacking own sources of income. They also need knowledge, expertise and inspiration, or in short they need your cooperation and support.

We are happy to work with you and UNECE and relevant stakeholders, particularly the research and the private sector, to support cities in their ambition and implementation towards the UN 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

Thank you!