

HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES TO BUILD FORWARD FAIRER

High-Level Dialogue on the Future of the International Human Rights Cities Movement

This is a summary of the discussions taken place during Plenary Session 1 of the 2021 World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF). This event was held on October 7 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the WHRCF. Know more at <https://uclg-cisd.org/en/work-areas/human-rights> or reach the UCLG-CSIPDHR Secretariat at cisd1@uclg.org

Opening remarks

The **UCLG Secretary General Emilia Sáiz** noted how the partnership agreement between UCLG and the WHRCF was as strong as ever. She recalled how, at last year's meeting, this same group realized how a lot had to be done to ensure no one was left behind in the context of the crisis and transformations the world was going through. The commitment to work together on local governments and human rights was more necessary than it was ever before. UCLG members showed their willingness to take a leading role in fostering respect for human rights.

Developing a partnership agreement with the OHCHR will help to consolidate this momentum. Both UCLG and the OHCHR pledged in support of human rights protection in Myanmar and Afghanistan. UCLG is committed to not only be an observer, but to act and be part of key transformations. Facing the crisis to come, human rights will be a critical part of the solution. It is a matter of putting people first. Local values of caring, solidarity and common good will inspire the new generation of human rights. The UN "Common Agenda" and UCLG's "Pact for the Future" will help institutionalize these political discussions and produce the foundations of a new social contract with human rights at the heart.

The **OHCHR Deputy High Commissioner Nada al Nashif** recalled how the pandemic was behind rising levels of poverty, unemployment and loss of livelihoods. She noted how the present moment is key to advance towards a fairer and more equal society. To do so, we must address inequalities and exclusion, rebuild the social contract and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights as recalled in the "Common Vision" introduced by the UN Secretary General. This same vision stressed the need to reinforce the inclusiveness of the multilateral system and create a UN advisory group on local governments.

This joint work on human rights should play an important role in this endeavor. Ms. al-Nashif mentioned some initiatives undertaken by local authorities

introducing human rights principles to COVID-19 responses and recovery efforts, ranging from the right to housing to food, health or social protection. She argued how these types of events were particularly important to increase the OHCHR awareness of promising experiences. This event should welcome new inputs on how to move forward in OHCHR's cooperation with UCLG.

The **Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the UN Taheo Lee** congratulated the OHCHR and UCLG for holding this event, also celebrating the WHRCF role in integrating human rights principles in local policies. Mr. Lee stressed the important role played by local governments in realizing human rights on the ground, providing opportunities to excluded groups. He also noted how the Republic of Korea is fully engaged in advancing the recognition of local governments' role in promoting and protecting human rights at the UN level. At a Human Rights Council level, this agenda has received increasing interest by national delegations. The same Council adopted last year a new resolution about this agenda in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to develop new reports and evidence about this matter. Mr. Lee argued how it is not enough to localize human rights standards; local and regional governments should also have an extended engagement at an international level and expand together the policy agenda.

First segment

Addressing the added value of local human rights policies in giving more effective responses to the social crisis caused by the pandemic. Key institutional evolutions in local policy-making

The **Secretary General of UCLG ASPAC Bernadia Tjandradewi** moderated this panel, composed by mayors and local government leaders. She recalled how this conversation was key to give more visibility to their practices aimed at advancing inclusive responses to the pandemic towards sustained prosperity.

The **Mayor of Jeonju (South Korea) Kim Seung-su** noted how his administration strived to make Jeonju a more human city based on people and ecology. The local fabric of Jeonju showed its resilience in the context of the pandemic, with the creation of networks of solidarity and municipal support programs to small businesses and residents who have seen a sudden drop in their livelihoods. Cooperation with local actors has been crucial to tackle this social disaster and protect the most vulnerable, upholding values of human rights and dignity. Jeonju followed this same philosophy to carry out urban upgrading initiatives connecting local development and culture to offer opportunities for the economically marginalized. The city addressed the upgrading of a city area which was home to a red-light district by considering the needs of sex workers, recognizing the memory of the place and providing sex workers with financial support and labor alternatives.

The **Councilor of Rivas Vaciamadrid (Spain) Aida Castillejo** argued how the crisis showed local governments capacity to address people's needs by innovating as public administration. Even though municipalities are working with scarce resources, their contribution to social protection and economic recovery is essential. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities, Rivas endeavored various policies to offer social protection and guarantee the right to education and women rights. Many of these initiatives were already in place prior to the pandemic and benefited from structural cooperation with local associations. Rivas agreed with the idea that human rights can play a central role in revamping the social contract at the local level, along with citizens. Ms. Castillejo also argued how the right to the city vision is now more relevant than ever before, and that we must move forward by reclaiming quality public spaces.

The **Mayor of Sfax (Tunisia) Mounir Elloumi** noted how, as human rights are attached to all people, to their lives and to all human activities, we should consider the places they live - cities and urban territories - as incubators of these rights. It is in territories, close to where people live, that human rights are best recognized for their relationship with all aspects of human activity. Where we can check if rights are realized or not. Of course, local governments are the first administration responsible to facilitate this interaction. However, Mr. Elloumi noted how not all cities are at the same level or count with the same financial capacities. Mr. Elloumi noted how his city has been particularly affected by the pandemic. Throughout these last months, its main priority has been to care for the most vulnerable, migrants and refugees especially. To do so, cooperation with local and international partners has been key.

The **Mayor of Subang Jaya (Malaysia) Noraini Roslan** shared how inclusion is a central value of Subang Jaya's development model. She recognized the valuable policy links between SDGs and human rights policies in making sure no one is left behind. Subang Jaya put in place specific initiatives focusing on concrete SDGs: for example, addressing accessibility in public space, offering social protection to the most vulnerable or addressing the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees by providing shelter and education for children. Subang Jaya also paid an important attention to the needs of elderly people and women, and established participation mechanisms to make sure the perspectives of the most vulnerable are well heard.

The **Co-Mayor of Utrecht and UCLG-CSIPDHR Co-President Linda Voortman** noted how this meeting was part of a long-term conversation kicked off in 2019 and followed-up in 2020 on the occasion of this same WHRCF Forum. She stressed how the world will never be the same as it was before the pandemic: not only old contradictions have deepened, but new complex tensions emerged as well. Global challenges such as climate change are already affecting our lives. In

this context, human rights can't only operate as aspirations, but concrete tools by which we push for concrete transformations on areas such as sustainable ecosystems, tackling structural inequalities or guiding an inclusive digitalization of our society. Human rights policies make a difference in cities, as shown by promising initiatives put in place by UCLG members. We need to put all these transformations into a collective narrative and roadmap showing the way towards the world we want to live in.

With this aim, human rights cities in the UCLG-CSIPDHR will influence the Pact for the Future process. First, carrying out the update process of the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City to define a common denominator to improve our daily practices and position human rights cities as drivers of transformation. This process can also help us push for a new generation of human rights agenda in key areas such as: right to live in a healthy environment and sustainable world; right to equality to address global disparities and shift from economic visions based on sufficiency only; digital rights and promoting an inclusive and ethical digitalization of society. Second, advancing a new partnership agreement between the UCLG and OHCHR to put more focus on local governments work to localize human rights. In this process, we should not forget to include all our partners in the human rights and right to the city movement. The Pact for the Future process should remain inclusive and recognize civil society inputs.

Second segment

Addressing the key role played by human rights in triggering local government collective initiatives at an international level. Key initiatives for the 2021/22 period and new horizons

The **Human Rights Commissioner of Vienna (Austria) Shams Asadi** noted how there are two main ways to look at local governments' human rights work. First, to recognize their day to day work and service delivery as human rights action; even if they don't call it like that, cities implement human rights. Second, to highlight local affirmative actions as key to uphold human rights universal values, reaching those left behind. Vienna is involved in the human rights cities' movement both locally as well as internationally. The Austrian capital recently hosted the Fundamental Rights Forum which saw the presentation of a new framework for developing human rights cities commitments by the FRA. Vienna is looking forward to working on the renewal of the Global Charter-Agenda process and to continue advancing the partnership process with the OHCHR. However, Ms. Asadi argued how local authorities need to advance from exchange and informal meetings only towards shared standards and providing some kind of formal recognition to human rights cities.

The **International Relations Directress of Montreal (Canada) Veronique Lamontagne** shared how her city is also celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Montrealese Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. This is an opportunity to reaffirm Montreal's commitment towards human rights through new dedicated policies. These initiatives are building upon the work done by Montreal's local human rights ecosystem, made of plenty of civil society organizations working on this issue. Montreal is reviewing its normative framework and public service delivery standards. The city is also advancing new programs focusing on inclusion, all enshrined in Montreal's strategic plan. At an international level, Montreal is also aware of its international role and is proud to participate in direct discussions with the multilateral system focusing on concrete human rights issues such as migration governance. Ms. Lamontagne envisaged human rights as central to Montreal's international horizons and looked forward to finding better ways to articulate with relevant stakeholders.

The **Human Rights Directress of Barcelona (Spain) Anabel Rodriguez** highlighted how cities like Barcelona are home to large inequalities. Her city implements the rights-based approach to better address these disparities at their roots. The pandemic has exacerbated socio-economic challenges and forced public administrations to adapt, triggering transformations that will remain long after the crisis is over. The pandemic has equally unveiled new challenges, such as addressing the digital divide, mental health issues or disparities of access to vaccines. Ambitious responses to this ever-evolving scenario need multi-level cooperation and to provide support to local governments work. Decentralized cooperation between local authorities is also a meaningful way to advance citizenship rights through both knowledge sharing and political advocacy.

The **International Relations Director of Quilmes (Argentina) Fernando Collizzolli** fully agreed with the WHRCF's proposal to revamp the social contract based on human rights, democracy, integral development and care for the most vulnerable populations, particularly migrants. At a local level, Quilmes is committed to build a modern and sustainable public administration that favours citizen participation and expands local democracy. Feminism, sustainability and the environment are central values within Quilmes' vision. Talking about human rights is more important than ever, as episodes of violence and discrimination are on the rise, along with socio-economic inequalities. Public policies are our tool to address these challenges. However, a structural shift in mainstream values and material conditions for development is also needed to ensure the success of the transformation cities' aspire to achieve. Regional and international cooperation is therefore so important: Cities, in spite of their differences, share common goals and are stronger together.

Claudia Barri, representing the Human Rights and Sexual Diversity Direction of the Mexico City government, stressed the importance of addressing inequalities through human rights-based approaches. This is a rising challenge in all countries and ambitious policies are needed. The pandemic

affected especially the most vulnerable, and it did so in multiple forms. Mexico City put in place concrete measures to address these impacts over sex workers and children suffering from violence. Mexico's capital also put in place training programs and dedicated staff to protect women suffering from violence in the family context. Mexico City is eager to learn from and with other cities.