

**Speech Emilia Saiz**

**VNG Keynote Speech**

**17<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

## **The next frontier of the municipal movement**

Dear colleagues and friends:

I am sure that for many of you this building is an important symbol for the municipalities of the Netherlands. It does indeed feel like home to me too. Not only because it is in this very street where I started my professional career but also because VNG has always been the alma mater of our movement, holding its Secretariat during many years during the initial steps after its creation in 1913.

The municipal associative movement is deeply rooted in Dutch values and has greatly benefited from what this country has learned from its own decentralization processes and also from its international aspirations which are part of the Dutch DNA and that, since the Golden Age, have been feeding the understanding of international trade and relations.

The Dutch agenda in the international municipal movement has always revolved around the great value of diplomacy and city diplomacy in particular. It has been about the importance of collective knowledge and peer to peer exchanges as cornerstones of strong associations of local governments, capable of ensuring collective interlocution before the national governments.

This agenda can be found in our shared values as a movement and are today as relevant as they were a century ago.

Thank you.

Thank you for being one of the corner stones of our movement. Thank you for inviting me to deliver these remarks and thank you for allowing me to witness first-hand just how every part of our movement is growing strong each day, which is particularly important as we enter a decade that will be crucial for human development.

United Cities and Local Governments represents, through its members, over 250.000 cities, regions, and local governments around the world. All of the cities that we represent have individual needs that sometimes might be at odds with each other but there is one thing that unites us: our wish to improve the live of the communities.

As time has passed, our movement has matured and we have come to realise that, in this interconnected world, it will be up to local governments to be the sentinels of the expectations of the citizens. Holding back on decision making or service delivery is NOT an option for the constituency we represent.

This is when our shared values become current and remain relevant, no matter where in the world you come from.

Fair societies built around accountable institutions. Policies that are built around the needs and aspirations of the communities. Security to provide livelihoods that allow our families to reach good lives, and solidarity and intergenerational responsibility for a sustainable world.

Our action at international level is therefore not an aim in itself, but an instrument to ensure that decisions that will affect the day to day lives of our communities are not taken without the vision of this very communities. It is at the same time the only way in which global transformative agendas will be met. The involvement of people is critical, and this involvement is unthinkable without community ownership.

The 2030 agenda, the SDGs, have marked a point of no return in our international action. The inclusion of a specific SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities is a testament to the acknowledgment of our spheres of government in the achievement of a sustainable planet. We know that only with us, and with a link between local actions and the global goals, there will be a sustainable planet. Implementation will be local or it will not be.

This process has also shown us that, as a movement, we cannot only demand that the world listens to cities but we also need to ensure that cities are listening.

I believe the framework defined by the 2030 Agenda represents a common code; an opportunity to renew the social contract, to rethink relationships, and to transform the world for the better.

It is important to put to the test the values and the commitments that we undertook in our last World Congress in Durban. We need a transformation in our development model, and it can only occur if it responds to the dreams of our communities, if it answers what they expect of us, and if we all take responsibility for the wellbeing of our planet.

**This is where our movement is headed in the coming decades.**

To guarantee the future of the world, we need to be a movement driven by **equality**, that tackles the increasing inequalities that are at the core of many of the problems in the world. Our movement **cares** for those that need it most, it **cares** about who, and how, can access public space and public spaces and will fight for inclusive, affordable and fair service delivery, and it **cares** about equality of men and women, that need to be at the heart of public policies.

The future that we want needs to have a human heart. We will work to secure that the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution works for our communities, that technology is shaped by the people that will use it, and not the other way around. We will also fight to ensure that everyone's digital rights are being respected and withheld. We need to contribute to the process of going from a production and consumption driven to a creative and caring society.

**Our issues, those that our communities are already working on, transcend not just local and regional spheres, but also borders.**

The right to adequate housing the renewal of democracy, and a rights-based approach to migration have been cornerstones of our action over the past years, and they will continue to be proudly championed by our movement. We will also place culture in highest regard, as the fourth pillar of development to ensure that the future is people-centred.

I have talked about owning the agendas, about making sure that local issues are at the core of global decision-making, since they cannot only be solved at the local level.

Finally, we as international municipal movement have a critical contribution to the way communities connect with the world to the next frontier of globalization.

We need to ensure that global governance is less a system of competing powers, and more a system of cooperation between spheres of government and stakeholders. Cities have been calling for the international system to listen to us, but we are also ready to listen, to offer spaces for all of our partners, to co-create, together, the societies that we want for the future.

This transformation of governance is what we call for if we are to move from the current **international** system to an **interurban** model based on solidarity, that places the protection of living

beings at the core of its agenda and is able to truly carry out the ecological transition that we call for.

All of what I have described above is the shared municipalist agenda that all of the members of United Cities and Local Governments approved in our World Congress in Durban.

Dear friends, dear colleagues of VNG: our task, your task, of defending this municipalist agenda builds on a century of collaborations, collaborations that will be further enhanced to face the implementation decade and truly make it our decade: the decade of localization.

Working to secure a future for humanity sounds like an immense challenge, but I am sure you will all agree with me that it is perhaps the most enticing challenge there is.

We are counting on you to think local and act global. Let our transformative diplomacy define the world.

Thank you.