Local voices in Bogotá announce a new era of strong and committed local governments

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12 October marked the opening of the largest global gathering of local and regional leaders and their partners: Bogotá 2016. Colombia’s capital city is hosting the 2016 edition of the UCLG World Summit, “Local Voices for a Better World”, from 12 to 15 October.

This event represents local and regional leaders’ commitment to sustainable development, and promotes the key role that the level of government closest to the people plays in the main development agendas and global government. The Summit boasts a broad programme of sessions, including policy dialogues; learning forums; plenaries based on the cornerstones of the Global Agenda of Local and Regional Governments for the 21st Century; and a network hub, a centre which offers different spaces for informal and face-to-face exchange, as well as a digital communication centre to connect and amplify the conversations that take place at the Summit.

The first day began with the Official Opening Ceremony, which was attended by the President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, the Mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, the President of UCLG and Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş, and Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, who introduced a speech from United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. The Mayor of Bogotá welcomed attendees as he launched a programme of learning and exchange, promising four days of “sharing experiences, learning from one another, making cities happier”. 
The Secretary-General of the United Nations congratulated attendees on this historic gathering in the last few days leading up to the adoption of the New Urban Agenda; Ban Ki-moon affirmed the role of local governments in the process, by stating that “the catalytic role of local governments in the gathering of all stakeholders will be key to ensuring that policies at all levels meet the requirements and needs of communities”.

In his address, Juan Manuel Santos welcomed the mayors and delegates, who had come from all corners of the world. The President of Colombia, who was recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, said that “the challenge posed by urban and city planning is to translate urban planning into inclusion, social investment, community and the reclaiming of public spaces”.

Building on the spirit of Istanbul

The Summit is being held at a decisive moment for the international municipal movement, as this gathering is taking place immediately before the adoption of the New Urban Agenda in Quito, from 17 to 20 October. In this context, a large delegation of local and regional governments will travel from Bogotá to Quito to make their messages heard by the international community, as the organization has been doing throughout the process to define the New Urban Agenda.

UCLG President and Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş, opened his speech at the Opening Plenary: The era of strong local government by expressing his appreciation for the inclusiveness of the Habitat III process: “We are grateful for the efforts made to ensure that the Habitat III process has been inclusive with a strong role played by all stakeholders, in particular local and regional governments.”
The opening session was attended by Joan Clos, Secretary-General of Habitat III and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, who was thanked for his support; Enrique Peñalosa, Mayor of Bogotá; Kadir Topbaş, UCLG President and Mayor of Istanbul, and Clare Short, Chair of Cities Alliance.

Joan Clos, referring to the New Urban Agenda, affirmed that "we are fully aware of the challenges that cities pose, and, for this reason, this New Urban Agenda puts us in a good position to lead them together with local governments".

The Mayor of Istanbul emphasized the importance that the future Urban Agenda would have for all the local leaders of the world and citizens alike: "we all know that the New Urban Agenda speaks about our daily work; for this reason, the recommendations that we will take to Quito are based on our experience and reflect our policy debates and the cooperation between our global networks".

With these words the UCLG President referred to the recommendations that local and regional governments had contributed to the Habitat III process and to the need to change the financing mechanisms in order to include local governments in the implementation of the development agendas. The Mayor of Istanbul also welcomed, together with the attendees, the mention and recognition that the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments had received in the Habitat III - draft New Urban Agenda. The World Assembly is the mechanism through which the final inputs of local governments will be defined, and its sessions are about to be held in Bogotá (14 October) and Quito (16 October).

The plenary recalled the spirit of Habitat II and called for a seat at the international negotiating table for local governments.

**Stronger, more accountable local and regional governments**

Following the plenary, one of the other most important sessions of the day took place, the Policy Dialogue - Stronger, more accountable local and regional governments.
The policy dialogue on stronger, more accountable local and regional governments saw a lively debate, moderated by Chair of the Cities Alliance board, Clare Short. Speakers placed a particular emphasis on citizen mobilization in strengthening local governments, and on the role of gender equality in local democratic accountability. Mayor of Diyarbakır, Gültan Kışanak, opened the session by explaining the role of citizen assemblies in fostering local democracy in her city.

She also explained the policy of having a co-mayoralty of one man and one woman in order to ensure equal female representation at the highest level of local government. Greg Munro, Secretary General of CLGF, argued that local governments is strongest when it is connected and responsive to a strong civil society, a point echoed by Maria Fare, Policy Specialist at the SDG Action Campaign.
Fare argued that citizen mobilization in the My World participatory process had been decisive in the inclusion of SDG16 on peace, justice and strong institutions in the 2030 Agenda. Finally, Dirk Schwenzefer, Head of Delegation, Commissioner for the Private Sector and Local Authorities, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), explained the complexities of decentralization processes in Germany and emphasized the need for decentralized cooperation between local and regional governments to share good practices.

Strengthening the international municipal movement: co-create our cities

The World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders is not just about policy. It’s also the ideal place to reinvigorate the international municipal movement, share experience and knowledge among local and regional governments and rethink how to co-create cities. Therefore, the sessions of the first day also included the Permanent Working Platform that has this very objective.
UCLG is using the Permanent Working Platform ‘Co-creating the city’ to experiment with new forms of networked collaboration. The first session was held on the opening day of the summit and focused on “co-creating the city – right to the sustainable city”. In response to the question “How do we promote the Right to the City in the policies of local governments?”, civil-society participants, such as activists, NGOs and representatives of other sectors, described practices and experiences that they promote in cities.

Participants praised the commitment that UCLG had made to the Right to the City; the organization believes that the Right to the City is an approach which must be put forward by the new governance necessary to achieve the kind of society that can face the uncertain future challenges and achieve the development goals agreed jointly in the 2030 Agenda.

The programme for the day also included a space to define media and communications professionals’ role in the development of sustainable cities, the Urban Journalism Academy; the UCLG regional sections' Caucuses; the Guangzhou Award Technical Assessment; a Migration and Mobility workshop, and a Community forum on Intermediary Cities.

The Summit's programme has started and will run for three days, providing its attendees with a space for meeting and exchange among local and regional elected representatives from around the world.

For more information:

- Follow #UCLGCongress y #BogotaeslaCumbre
• Look at the programme on the website
• Look at the Flickr album
• Follow the IISD coverage