

Press release
For immediate release

European cities and towns shaping low carbon, greener futures in Dunkerque

Dunkerque, France 21 May 2010 - More recognition of the role local and regional authorities can play and the creation of smart, sustainable economies were the messages delivered at the 6th Sustainable Cities and Towns Conference. After three days of debate, analysis, discussions and presentations the more than 1,500 participants at Dunkerque 2010, Europe's largest local sustainability event, accepted two political declarations that aim to shape the role of local governments in years to come.

"These declarations contain the essential means to evolve developing European policies. They contain the vital elements of our ideas and work so we need to put all our energy behind them" said Michel Delebarre, President of the Metropolitan Council of Dunkerque, host of the event.

In an ever changing economic, political and strategic background, 2010 is a landmark year for the recognition of local autonomy and territorial cohesion. The Lisbon Treaty enters into force, but there are still many uncertainties on how economic growth and sustainability will or can be managed. The Dunkerque 2010 Local Sustainability Declaration states that we must make the transition to a sustainable, green and inclusive economy, as current models are resource and energy intensive and cannot stand up to a changing economic climate.

It demands that we prioritise investments and manage resources in a more efficient and greener way to enhance citizens quality of life. European cities and town must ensure that all citizens can fully take part in a low carbon lifestyle. By creating innovative, sustainable and inclusive communities we can make our cities and towns better places to live in.

Gino Van Begin, ICLEI's Regional Director for Europe said, "We can and must aspire to create a system of governance that integrates local and regional governments more actively, that gives these local and regional governments the chance to influence and be more coherently included in EU policies and resources."

"This is a key moment for the construction of what I call a European community of local governments for sustainable development," said Delebarre. "We want to be listened to and brought on board. We need to work more effectively together whatever the limitations," he continued when calling for integration between the many levels of governance.

By accepting the declaration participants made it clear that change can only be made with the support of national and international governments and institutions. The participants and organisers alike acknowledge the fact that the European Commission is going in the right direction regarding sustainable development, but that the European institutions need to move closer to citizens if funding programmes and legislation are to be effective.

A second declaration, The Dunkerque 2010 Call on Climate Action, insists that local governments send strong messages to national and international governments so the disappointment of COP15 and the Copenhagen Accord are not repeated. Reduction targets must be more ambitious if we are to come to a meaningful post 2012 climate agreement. This declaration also recognises that if we are to reach a low carbon, climate resilient and green economy in Europe, local and regional governments must be a fully integrated party.

In the final plenary Michel Delebarre presented these declarations to the representatives of national governments and the European Commissioners for the Environment, Janez Potocnik, and Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, on behalf of the participants of Dunkerque 2010. Reacting to the declarations Hahn said, “We need you our cities for a healthy wealthy Europe”. Following the success of this, the 6th European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign Conference, it is clear that European citizens are willing to take up the challenge.

For more information:

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Background

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organisations. ICLEI currently has 1,100 members worldwide and 200 in Europe.

Founded in 1990, ICLEI provides technical consulting, training, and information services to build capacity, share knowledge, and support local government in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level. With its European Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) TM Campaign it supports local governments in with local climate change mitigation and adaptation action, using the 5-milestone process to guide communities.

Dunkerque 2010 explored how sustainable development can help local governments to face the current economic, social and climate challenges and how it can be further implemented in the current context of crisis. Key actors convened to identify the changes needed to our political frameworks and explored how different sectors can cooperate to advance sustainable development in Europe.

As the largest conference in Europe to address climate change after Copenhagen 2009 (COP15), the event offered a unique opportunity to position local governments as willing partners and leaders on emissions reductions and innovative solutions. It is the largest European event dedicated to local sustainable development, and follows the successful conferences of Aalborg 1994, Lisbon 1996, Hanover 2000, Aalborg 2004 and Sevilla 2007.

The Metropolitan Council of Dunkerque is a French intercommunal structure which includes 18 municipalities in the Nord department and the region Nord-Pas-de-Calais. It is an industrial and seaport conurbation which has chosen to develop its industrial character in harmony with the people and their environment. Sustainable development is thus the common thread in policy documents relating to local development including the 2000-2015 Strategic Plan for the Conurbation. As a result, sustainable development is applied to all public policies (health, transport, education, culture, water, energy, waste, economic development, town planning, etc.).