



## **Open letter to UN Secretary-General H.E. Mr. António Guterres**

*In copy to the President of the UN General Assembly H.E. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande  
In copy to the President of ECOSOC H.E. Munir Akram*

Excellency,

On behalf of Mayors from all over the world, under the auspices of the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), please receive our cordial salutations on the observance of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. We also congratulate you on your exemplary leadership of the UN system towards the goals and targets set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The COVID19-pandemic has exposed the deficit in both global regulation and national territorial policies, with the bulk of the crisis residing in cities and other urban centres. As annexed to this letter, the GPM calls upon the UN to open up discussions on the transformation of the existing world order – allowing cities and the world’s urbanity to be represented, alongside member states in our global systems. It is time that global governance moves into its next iteration – one where cities and global networks of cities sit as equal partners in shaping national and international policy. It is clear that the current system of governance, dominated by nations interacting with nations and working to the exclusion of other political and institutional leaders is not equipped to cope with the current world’s challenges the way they are now – from the climate emergency to migration, from security to identity politics, from health to tackling poverty.

With the majority of people already live and work in cities, and now, 75 years after the founding of the United Nations, the time has come for the UN to start a global dialogue with cities and their leaders about the UN we need. We appeal to you to launch and lead this debate.

The world will carefully listen to the speech you are going to deliver on the occasion of the UN General Assembly in September 2020. Hence, we ask you to recognize the important role of cities for a multilateral and rules-based international political system and launch a global dialogue with cities with the aim of an institutional reform which will lead to a formalised participation of cities in international decision-making processes.

We urge the UN to open up a transition period and discuss the best ways to installing representative bodies of cities in the UN system, in time for COP26. We support the *UCLG decalogue for the Covid-19 aftermath* stressing the importance of empowering cities. And finally we suggest that the UN 75th anniversary be an opening to take into consideration the existing format of the global order and to consider becoming the **United Nations and Cities of the World!**

We offer the support of the Global Parliament of Mayors in these endeavours as part of an expanded space for local governments within the UN system.

Yours faithfully,

**Mayor Peter Kurz**  
Mannheim, Germany  
Chair

**Mayor Steve Benjamin**  
Columbia (SC), USA  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair

**Mayor Grace Mary Mugasa**  
Hoima, Uganda  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chair

**Mayor Ricardo Rio**  
Braga, Portugal  
Treasurer

## **Appendix to the GPM Open Letter to UN Secretary-General H.E. Mr. António Guterres/ UN General Assembly, 15-30 September 2020**

In the past 75 years the world and the world system has fundamentally changed:

- the vast majority of humanity lives now in cities;
- these cities have grown in size and cluster in metropolitan areas;
- these cities are nodes in networks and are connected in transborder spaces of flows;
- those spaces of flows structure the worldwide mobility of goods, capital, services and people;
- the globalization process is thus not a mere internationalization, but more of an intercity world system;
- cities aren't anymore the "local" of the "country", they are the "nodes of the world system".

That new world system lacks adequate governance. The Corona pandemic crisis has shown the lack of global regulation. The world remains caught in the "united nations" based on the 19th century idea of the nation-state and the 20th century post war challenges of inter-national collaboration. This global system did create relatively successful international organizations and structures. Unfortunately, they are not able to contain private and corporate multinational interests nor can they resist nationalism and fundamentalism challenging democracy. Exiting the lockdown will even strengthen these challenges.

The world is longing for an enlarged democratic system of governance.

Industrialization and globalization have produced planetary challenges. They all have been put to a test in this health crisis.

First of all, climate change, but also Covid-19, has revealed a deeper ecosystemic crisis, that urges us to review our relationship with nature in a more sustainable way. We have to acknowledge that since Kyoto the objectives have not been met. Our youth is disappointed in our inability to deliver. And for cities these challenges are urgent problems to deal with: traffic jams, clean air, energy, water, green, food provision, etc.

Second, global social inequality remains challenging. And again, the sanitary measures have only deepened them. All the more that the concentration of wealth in fewer hands has led to a rapid financialization of our economies, leading to systemic instability. Public authorities lack sufficient means to cope with social needs. And for cities these challenges are urgent problems to deal with: slums and poor neighbourhoods, education, social inclusion and cohesion, public services and welfare provisions, etc.

Third, human mobility has increased, and cities are the places of arrival. Urban societies are multicultural, multireligious, multilingual and above all hybrid and mixed. Superdiverse. Even if the post-corona era will reduce mobilities and flows, for cities these challenges will remain urgent problems to deal with: social inclusion, education, multilingual facilities, migration, cosmopolitan cultures, urban culture and events, post national imaging, etc.

These agendas create instability. That ultimately threatens peace and democracy, creates authoritarianism and geopolitical insecurity. Whereas technological development and increased citizens awareness ask for deepening democracy, for more participation and coproduction. Restarting our economies demands for bottom-up strategies and focus on foundational economy. Cities and their metropolitan region are the right scale to start up: close to their population cities are innovating democracy, citizens participation, developing urban commons, installing sustainable neighbourhoods, experimenting with councils and participatory budgets, multiscalar governance, etc.

All these planetary challenges are concentrated in cities and will have to be dealt with in cities. But cities lack the means and competences to adequately respond to these necessities. They are reduced to be local governments in a national system. They lack the means to govern the urban complexities. They are caught in uncontrolled processes of global markets and competition and national regulations. And above all, national governments and international governance do not give a place to the urban world. Global negotiations and treaties remain in the hands of national leaders. Mayors and cities can only observe.

That is why, we Mayors from all over the world, leaders of cities, and working towards a Global Parliament of Mayors, ask the United Nations and the global institutions to open a debate, especially after the global pandemic crisis, on a renewed global system of governance, taking into consideration the real structure of global societies, the planetary challenges and where they have to be dealt with. It goes without saying that besides the Global market and the System of Nation-States the Networked Cities cannot be overlooked. Global urbanity needs to be represented in global governance. That is not the role of national leaders or global organisms. That is the role of Mayors, leaders of cities, members of urban networks. We do support the *UCLG-decalogue for the Covid-19 aftermath* stressing the importance of empowering cities.

We urge the UN at its 75th anniversary to take into consideration the existing format of the global order and to consider becoming the **United Nations and Cities of the World!**

We urge the UN to open up a transition period installing representative bodies of cities and working with them in inter-national collaboration. We do offer all the support of the Global Parliament of Mayors in this endeavour.