JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2023 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
of the organized constituency of local and regional governments
I. Preamble

1) We, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, gathering over 35 global city and region networks worldwide, adopted the present declaration, which captures our perspectives, insights and experiences as key elements for accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels, the theme of the 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, towards the mid-term review of the 2030 Agenda on the occasion of the second SDG Summit, to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly on 18-19 September 2023.

2) We represent the diversity of united voices gathered within the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments from across the globe, representing the populations of metropolises, peripheral cities, intermediary cities, regions, rural areas, and small municipalities, gather as an organized constituency convened by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, and facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). We come as members of coalitions and platforms, regional networks, national consortiums and local and international associations.

3) In this year of mid-term review of the SDGs, we renew our resolve to fulfil the aspiration of the 2030 Agenda and the principles enshrined in it, including to leave no one behind. We welcome in this sense this HLPF as a milestone in the preparation for the SDG Summit and the theme of its general debate “Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs”.

We recognize the positive role of the HLPF as a central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and a space with an unparalleled potential to become an reporting platform for all the actors working towards implementation, including local and regional governments.

4) We recognize the substantive role of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in the preparations for the thematic reviews of the 2023 HLPF, and in ensuring and coordinating the input of Major Groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) to the HLPF and other intergovernmental processes on sustainable development as underlined by the 2030 Agenda.

5) We appreciate the holding of the Local and Regional Governments Forum (LRGF), facilitated by UCLG on behalf of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments in collaboration with UN DESA, UN-Habitat, UNDP and Local 2030, as part of the official program of the HLPF.

6) We stress the importance of the LRGF since 2018 as a collective political forum to accelerate the SDGs and pledge to continue working with organising partners to further consolidate it as a space that embodies and strengthens the engagement of the constituency with the HLPF and the 2030 Agenda, and commit to ensure it is multi-stakeholder and multi-level.
7) We acknowledge the continued process of in-depth review of the SDGs, with this year review of SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals. We understand these goals as articulators of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, building on the principle of interconnectedness between all the SDGs that provides a blueprint for a global partnership for the goals overcoming silos in their implementation.

8) We reclaim SDG 11 as an indispensable accelerator of the 2030 Agenda as it represents the opportunity to place urban and territorial equality at the heart of all actions to achieve the SDGs from a human rights perspective. This is fundamental for ensuring that the trade-offs between the different SDGs are navigated and enables the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

9) We call on the High-Level Political Forum to reflect the bold recommendations of the UN Secretary General’s report on Our Common Agenda to create a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system within the United Nations, with the role of cities and other subnational authorities particularly being recognized.

10) We welcome the Final Report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, A Breakthrough for People and Planet, which dedicates a full section to cities and regions, recommends for them a special status in the renewed multilateral system, and proposes that the Summit of the Future serves to identify relevant institutions and processes where LRGs are offered a formal and permanent status, including in the area of sustainable development. We further welcome the recommendation contained in the report by the UN High-Level Advisory Board that localization should be an explicit part of national commitments on the 2030 Agenda.

11) As we reaffirm our commitment to actively contribute to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda, we underline the central role for cities, local and regional governments in advancing sustainable development, working in synergistic relationships across the rural-urban continuum. We note that an estimated 65% of SDG targets must be implemented in urban areas with engagement of local and regional governments.

12) While the SDGs are based on “reducing inequality within and among countries” and “achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls,” women’s rights, gender equality, and women’s empowerment, must be strategically at the centre of the efforts for the implementation of all UN development frameworks.

13) We recall the political declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, which calls on bolstering local action to accelerate implementation and empower and support cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda while recognizing their critical role in implementing and realising the Sustainable Development Goals. We further appreciate the draft political declaration of the SDG Summit 2023, which recognizes the important contribution of local and regional governments, among other groups, to the
2030 Agenda and to enhancing global, regional, national and local partnerships for sustainable development.

14) We further appreciate the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) with its call on national governments “to adapt knowledge and technologies to specific local and regional context to maximise synergies between the Goals and accommodate emerging challenges beyond the 2030 horizon”. We welcome the efforts by the independent group of scientists in charge of the 2023 GSDR to extend consultations with the organized constituency of local and regional governments as part of the report drafting process.

15) Reinstate our commitment to achieving the Universal Development Agendas, understanding that they need to be realized in unison through enhanced cooperation on critical challenges and gaps in global governance, we look forward to the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit as part of a same process towards a reinvigorated multilateral system where all the global development agendas are acknowledged and implemented as one.

II. Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews as policy tools for localizing transformation

16) In recalling the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, we reiterate that local and regional governments and their networks have led front-running transformative action to localize the universal development agendas. In recent years, monitoring and reporting processes of this action have evolved, becoming tools for policy development and co-creation.

17) The total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has been growing exponentially with 214 from 44 countries, representing a total of 579 million inhabitants, while Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have been also experiencing a rapid increase with 34 VSRs from 32 countries, representing 165,000 local governments and 1.3 billion inhabitants. In turn, there has been a notable increase in local and regional governments participation in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) processes since the first VNRs were published in 2016: LRG involvement was medium to high in 32% of countries that produced one in 2016, compared to 48% in 2022.

18) With VLRs and VSRs proving to have positive impacts in local governance –by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the SDGs— and in influencing national dialogues and mechanisms for SDG implementation and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), we reiterate our commitment to fostering the development of VLRs and VSRs and the strengthening of national coordination mechanisms, with a focus on raising awareness on the importance of localizing the SDGs.

19) We pledge to support the work of the Local 2030 Coalition, the elaboration of Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews (VLRs and VSRs), and the mobilisation of local and
regional governments, their associations and other local stakeholders for the integration of plans, policies, and programs at the local and subnational scales.

20) We call for the acknowledgment of VLR and VSR processes as policy tools integral to foster achievement of the universal development agendas and create more traction of the Goals. We further call for enhanced involvement of LRGs and their associations in national reporting processes, in particular through the VNRS, the promotion of the development of VLRs and VSRs, and the full recognition of local and subnational monitoring and reporting processes in official HLPF deliberations.

III. A next generation of local public service provision for SDG localization

21) Within the context of the SDG 11 in-depth review, we stress the direct interconnection of its localization with quality and equitable local public service provision as well as with the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Local public provision is a precondition for the achievement of the SDGs and the backbone of our cities, towns and territories ensuring that all communities, regardless of administrative status or any other condition, can live healthy, fulfilling and sustainable lives, through the provision of water and sanitation, housing, food security, education and healthcare, amongst others.

22) In line with the theme of this HLPF on “accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”, the dramatic social effects of the pandemic catalyzed the need for the next generation of public service provision, one that puts care for our communities and the planet at the center. This next generation of public service provision is based on reinforced social protection systems, where care services are no longer falling on women, racialized and/or migrant persons. Where accessibility is at the heart of rights-based policy-making and planning. Where access to the internet and technology to all is considered a baseline. Where mental health care and social counseling for people of all ages is available, where the upskilling of people is prioritized to empower communities and foster human creativity.

23) We stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be recognized, fostered, supported and mainstreamed at all levels, including by renewing the understanding of the commons as both resources and social practices that interconnect the local, national, regional and global spheres of action. We further stress the need to acknowledge the key role that local and regional public service provision plays in caring for people and the planet and protecting the commons, as well as its direct link to the implementation of SDG 11, the 2030 Agenda as a whole, and all the other development agendas. We further stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be strengthened through a new way of financing development.

24) We call on including local and regional governments, who have demonstrated the power of policy based on solidarity in decision-making at all levels and in the management of
complex emergencies, where LRGs have proven to be at the forefront of guaranteeing rights and equitable access to local public service provision.

IV. A new social contract for equality and democracy

25) Acknowledging the first of the 12 key proposals contained in Our Common Agenda, “to leave no one behind”, we are committed to address the urgent need of putting at the centre of public action at all levels to repair the impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities. Workers and persons living in informality, mostly migrant and displaced communities, together with women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and other structurally marginalized groups, have been among the hardest hit.

26) In order to address inequalities and their multidimensional roots, we commit to bring at the core of our efforts the development of a rights-centered, values-driven new social contract based on justice and local democracy, which recognizes the needs and aspirations of the historically marginalized and fosters gender equality and the participation of local feminist leaders in decision-making as core to democracy. We further commit to work towards ensuring that all people live healthy and fulfilling lives as the key to developing demographic resilience and face the overlapping crises.

27) We pledge to work in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders to retool the current system to mainstream a right-based approach to safe and affordable housing for all people, everywhere, acknowledging the value of common goods such as water and sanitation, and placing care for our populations at the center, reducing gaps in income and service access while enhancing the political participation of all.

28) For this new social contract to effectively address current inequalities to leave no one behind, we call on building on the voices and experiences of local communities and enhancing the participation and representation of women and girls, addressing accessibility barriers and the discrimination facing structurally marginalized groups to ensure all voices are at the decision-making tables and build trust back.

29) We further call to recognize the right to water and sanitation as a global common good to be collectively protected, through local to global actions, to promote adequate housing and equitable access to all common goods as a human right, accelerate the upgrading of informal settlements, pay closer attention to the needs and aspirations of communities regardless of administrative status, and bringing forward the role of culture as a global public good, including greater consideration of culture’s central role in supporting SDG achievement now, and the analysis of a potential stand-alone Culture Goal as part of the 2030 Agenda or in the post-2030.

30) We recognize that culture (intercultural dialogue, heritage in all forms, cultural diversity, creativity, transmission of knowledge) remains undervalued and underutilized in the
push for SDG progress. We will act to analyse the role of culture as a global public good, including greater consideration of culture’s role in supporting SDG achievement now, and the analysis of a potential stand-alone Culture Goal post-2030

V. A regenerated relationship with nature

31) Echoing the theme of this HLPF of driving transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs, we recall there is a pressing need to acknowledge that effective change at scale will only be possible by rethinking our relationship with nature and our ecosystems, adopting a rights-based approach through a renaturing lens to put care for our planet and social justice at the core of our joint action.

32) We commit to contribute to this transformation through localization processes that are nature-positive, bringing to consideration big and intermediary cities, small towns, regions and territories, and reinforcing urban-rural linkages and integrating proximity, biodiversity preservation and resilience approaches in policy-making and planning, which will in turn promote meaningful change in our patterns of transport, work, habitat, culture, health, education and consumption that are central to preserve our planet, develop urban and territorial quality of life, and harness inclusive innovation value creation while addressing climate change adaptation.

33) We further pledge to embody a vision for a better relationship with nature as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of the biodiversity of territories.

34) We call on the recognition of the key role of local and regional governments, cities and territories in the protection and promotion of local and global commons that contribute to regenerating livelihoods and protecting our planet and ecosystems, and their direct link to the achievement of SDG 11, all SDGs, and other international development agendas, such as the Paris Agreement or the Sendai Framework for Disaster and Risk Reduction.

35) We further call on supporting and fostering the transformation of our consumption and production patterns towards models grounded on proximity and circularity that are sustainable, accessible, inclusive, environmentally-sound and create ecological, cultural, economic and social value for communities, and to include local and regional governments in global discussions as they have consistently shown their innovative action in addressing biodiversity loss, building resilience, and granting access to water and sanitation and to affordable and clean energy, including through local public service provision.

VI. A revitalized multilateral system, high-impact partnerships, and a new financial system
36) As we welcome the Final Report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, A Breakthrough for People and Planet, whose six transformative shifts stress the importance of rebuilding trust in multilateralism and of broad representation of all spheres of government, we reaffirm our commitment to a revitalized multilateral system, inclusive, networked and anchored in human rights for all. Such renewed multilateral system must build on localization, local democracy and strengthened local self-government as a means to ensure peace, unity and trust in our institutions and to build a new social contract, with co-responsibility and active participation of all citizens at the center of global governance.

37) We commit to partnering in the building of a multilateral system characterized by multi-stakeholder engagement, multi-level governance, and decentralized sharing of power and responsibilities, where all actors are invited at the decision-making table. Including through a stronger, more inclusive HLPF that institutionalizes dialogue with local and regional governments, and by renewing the notion of partnerships based on intergovernmental coordination, cooperation among key actors and sectors to foster innovation and achieve the impact needed to close the gap in SDG implementation.

38) We commit to work hand in hand with Member States and other stakeholders to identify and address the principal challenges local and regional governments face in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas, including: weak capacities; limited support and financial transfers from national governments, limited local interest and/or awareness, and limited coordination with other levels of government.

39) Building on the call from Our Common Agenda, which highlights how a true global economy needs adequately resourced public sectors for the delivery of global public goods, we recall the critical importance of promoting a more distributive economic system as well as fairer financial and commercial practices to protect and improve local service provision, address inequalities, and develop green and social infrastructure throughout territories. We further call on rethinking financing and revenue streams to achieve the global agendas through a renewed fiscal architecture by directly targeting financing mechanisms empowering local and regional governments to strengthen their own resources, and localize and accelerate the SDGs.

40) We command the High-Level Political Forum and the ECOSOC Presidency to take note of the growing consensus calling for greater presence of local and regional governments in multilateral governance processes for the achievement of the SDGs and the global development agendas, and to continue supporting LRG engagement in light of the SDG Summit, the UN Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit.

VII. Our Expectations
41) We request Member States to acknowledge the commitment and pledges of the constituency of local and regional governments through this declaration and to support the processes mentioned in the above sections.

42) Fundamental, transformative, and urgent change at all levels and by all stakeholders is needed to overcome the crises and obstacles facing our world. Only by fostering co-creation and working together can we achieve the 2030 Agenda and build a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world for all.