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The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Annual Retreat opened its second day, the first with public discussions, with a practical question: how can cities and regions continue strengthening their influence in global decision-making at a time when multilateral institutions themselves are under strain?

The session, titled “100 Days of Local Multilateralism”, brought together leaders from local and regional government networks to take stock of where the movement stands—and what it can realistically shift over the coming months.

In her opening remarks, UCLG Secretary-General **Emilia Saiz** described the current moment as one of deep uncertainty for international cooperation. She argued that local multilateralism offers a way to engage globally when existing frameworks are under pressure, and that

periods of instability can also create space for political and institutional reform. Saiz recalled that the municipal movement has, for more than a century, argued for local and regional governments to be recognised not only as implementers of global agendas, but as political actors in their own right within international decision-making.

The “100 Days of Local Multilateralism” initiative is intended to bring greater coherence to advocacy across a crowded calendar of global milestones in 2026, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda, the World Urban Forum (WUF), and the UCLG World Congress and World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders in Tangier, alongside major processes on climate, gender equality and migration.

The structured process will begin on 21 April and conclude on 30 July 2026, with the aim of converging into a single collective agenda that channels the political will and diverse visions of communities across regions, and builds towards the UCLG World Congress in Tangier as the political high point of the 100 Days campaign.

For participants in the room, the challenge was not a lack of entry points, but how to use them strategically. Several speakers returned to the same concern: with so many global processes underway, local government networks risk spreading their efforts too thin. Saiz cautioned that “not all of us need to be everywhere,” calling instead for clearer choices about where to invest collective political capital. The aim, she said, is to assert local and regional governments as a sphere of government within multilateralism, backed by joint political messages carried into key global moments.

Calls for prioritisation were closely linked to the need for stronger coordination in a difficult political climate. **Gino Van Begin**, Secretary-General of ICLEI and member of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, warned that many local government networks are operating in an increasingly hostile political environment, where democratic norms are under pressure and civic space is shrinking. “We see a decline of democracy, and we may be outraged by the things that are happening in the world today, but that means we need to come together even more than before,” he said. Multilateralism, he added, needs “to have input from multi-levels” if international cooperation is to remain credible and connected to people’s realities.

Lucy Slack, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), looked back on the evolution of the Global Task Force since its creation in 2012. She recalled that early cooperation among local government organisations was marked by competition rather than collaboration. “We started the Global Task Force way back in 2012, and the local government community looked very different then,” she said. Today, she noted, the Task Force finds itself in a more fragile global context, one that may require a strategic “reset” to sharpen its political positioning and maximise impact.

Several participants linked this strategic focus to longer-term institutional demands. Speakers referred to ongoing efforts to secure more structured recognition of local and regional governments within the multilateral system, including discussions connected to United Nations reform processes, Article 55 of the United Nations Charter, and the role of the Local and Regional Governments Advisory Group. The objective, they argued, is to move beyond ad hoc participation towards more stable forms of representation that reflect the role of local governments as democratic institutions, not simply delivery partners.



While the session focused on governance reform, speakers repeatedly grounded their arguments in concrete policy domains, illustrating how global agendas intersect in cities and territories. Gender equality, climate action, migration, urban development and democratic renewal were presented not as separate files, but as interconnected fronts in the effort to renew multilateralism.

Nozibele Makanda of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) pointed to the Commission on the Status of Women as a key political entry point for feminist municipalism. “Women’s leadership at the local level is not symbolic. It is structural to inclusive governance,” she said, adding that justice is delivered through proximity, participation and public services.

Álvaro Soldevila of the Resilient Cities Network linked SDG 11 to public trust in institutions. “When we’re not delivering what we are supposed to do and we are losing the trust of people,” he said. “SDG 11 is not only about urban planning. In the moment that we’re living today, it’s about equity; it’s about democracy.”



Caroline Twigg of the Mayors Migration Council echoed the need for integrated approaches, noting that city-level commitments on migration intersect directly with housing, healthcare and economic inclusion.

The “100 Days” timeline was also framed as a way to align political advocacy with concrete delivery challenges. Speakers pointed to key events such as the UN Water Conference, the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP), the New Urban Agenda midterm review and the World Urban Forum as opportunities to demonstrate how global commitments translate into local public services, accessibility, financing and investment choices. **Eugenio Amato** from Regions4 stressed the importance of bringing concrete local solutions and investment examples into global reporting processes, while **Bárbara Pons Giner** of CIDEU warned that many cities face shrinking access to funding at the very moment when expectations on local delivery are expanding. **Jordi Pascual** of UCLG added that the UCLG World Congress in Tangier in June 2026 should be understood not only as a convening moment, but as a political decision-making space for consolidating shared positions on multilateral reform, public services and rights.

Shelley Nania of C40 highlighted how recent G20 cycles have narrowed formal spaces for city engagement, making it all the more important to sharpen collective positions within Urban 20 and allied platforms. **Nicolas Cimbaro** of Aude linked the UN Water Conference to the need for stronger recognition of local governments as key actors in water and sanitation governance, arguing that water must be treated as a public good backed by adequate local resources.

Sébastien Vauzelle of the UN Local2030 Coalition and Massimo Perrino, who outlined the pathway from the New Urban Agenda midterm review to the World Urban Forum and the High-Level Political Forum, both stressed the importance of aligning advocacy with concrete local delivery, while **Patricia Morla** of Villa Carlos Paz linked the “100 Days” agenda to disability rights and inclusion at the local level ahead of COSP.

Participants also pointed to emerging institutional openings as possible building blocks for a renewed multilateral architecture. **Rainer Kern**, Executive Director of the Global Parliament of Mayors, highlighted the UN Forum of Mayors as an emerging space for dialogue between mayors and the United Nations system. Plurilateral tracks such as Urban 20 (U20) and Urban 7 (U7) were discussed as complementary—but increasingly constrained—avenues for influence. Several speakers cautioned, however, that these formats should not substitute broader multilateral processes, underlining the continued importance of inclusive, universal frameworks.

The session closed with agreement that the “100 Days of Local Multilateralism” should culminate in a concise political roadmap for the Global Task Force, including joint messages and collective statements to be carried into major global forums. Participants stressed that the initiative should not become only a branding exercise, but a coordinated effort to secure lasting political recognition for local and regional governments as a core pillar of renewed multilateral governance.

For those in the room, the discussion marked a moment of collective stock-taking, but also of strategic reckoning about what it will take to turn access into influence. For readers following from a distance, it offers a window into how local and regional governments are seeking to move from participation in global debates to a more structured political role within them—at a time when the credibility of multilateral cooperation increasingly depends on what happens in cities and territories, where global commitments meet everyday realities.

MAPPING THE 2026 CALENDAR

Behind the campaign “100 Days of Local Multilateralism” lies a coordinated political calendar that local and regional governments are using to align their advocacy in 2026. The process runs from **21 April 2026 (World Creativity and Innovation Day) to 30 July 2026**, bringing together several key global milestones into a single political sequence.

The first major milestone is the **World Urban Forum (WUF13), taking place from 17 to 22 May 2026 in Baku, Azerbaijan**, which will bring local governments, national authorities and international institutions together to discuss the future of urban development and multilevel governance.

This is followed by the **UCLG World Congress and World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders in Tangier, 22–25 June 2026**, a key political moment for the local government movement to consolidate shared positions on multilateral reform, public services, climate action and rights.

The sequence culminates at the **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), 7–15 July 2026**, where local and regional governments will engage in the global review of **Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11)** on sustainable cities and communities. The **midterm review of the New Urban Agenda will take place on 16–17 July 2026**, immediately following the HLPF, providing a further opportunity to position local priorities within post-2030 discussions on urban development and multilevel governance.

Beyond these flagship moments, the 100 Days calendar also connects to parallel processes shaping local government advocacy in 2026, including the **Commission on the Status of Women** in March 2026, which will include a dedicated Local and Regional Governments Day on 11 and 12 March, the **Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP)** in June 2026, and the **UN Water Conference** in December 2026.

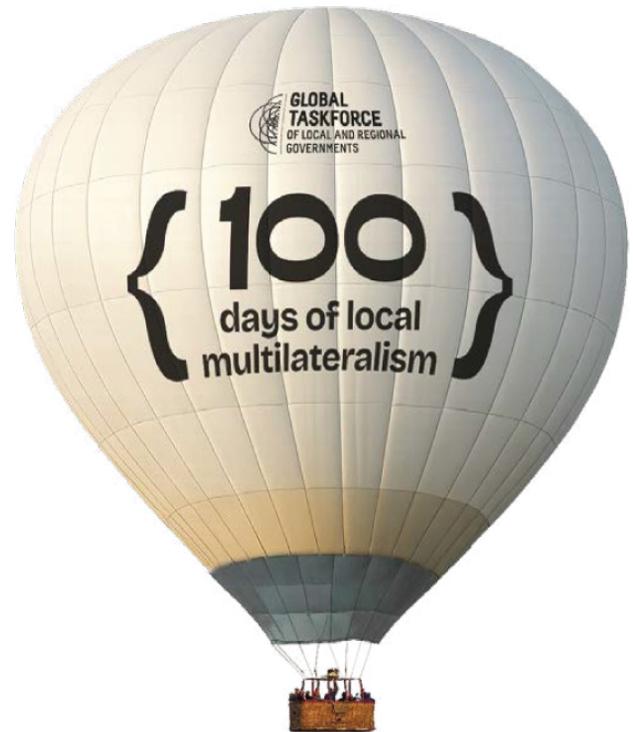
MULTIPLE ROUTES AND... ONE BALLOON

At one point during the “100 Days of Local Multilateralism” session, the discussion took an unexpected turn into metaphors.

Several participants compared today’s multilateral landscape to a **train line** with too many stops: gender here, climate there, migration further down the track. The problem, they suggested, is not the lack of stations, but deciding which ones to prioritise—and having the capacity to get off at the right moment with something meaningful to say.

Others widened the image into a **transport system**, with multiple routes, connections and modes of travel. Cities and regions, in this view, are not just passengers moving from one official platform to the next, but actors switching tracks between UN forums, political summits and informal coalitions, depending on where influence is possible.

The image hanging in the room, however, was a **balloon**. Expanding in all directions, full of energy—and at risk of drifting if not anchored. The metaphor stuck. With local governments now present across so many global agendas, the challenge is no longer how to join the conversation, but how to stay focused once inside it.



Behind the humour sat a serious point: in a crowded multilateral landscape, strategy may matter more than speed. Sometimes choosing the right stop, and knowing when not to board the next train, can be the most political decision of all.

THE NEW URBAN AGENDA, TEN YEARS ON



With 2026 set to mark a decade since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, local and regional government leaders meeting at the UCLG Retreat in Barcelona argued that the anniversary should be treated as a political hinge point—less commemoration, more course-correction. The message across the room was consistent: the New Urban Agenda remains a useful frame, but the next phase will be judged on whether it delivers power, resources and measurable results for cities and territories.

Opening the session, **Anna Calvete**, UCLG Head of Research, urged participants to slow down and take stock. “Ten years since Quito... is not simply a symbolic anniversary, but a political moment,” calling for a “strategic pause” amid strained multilateralism and a 2030 Agenda that is falling behind. The discussion, she noted, had three objectives: to assess what the New Urban Agenda has meant for local governments, identify gaps, and situate the agenda within wider debates, including the SDGs, the Pact for the Future and post-2030 discussions.

From South Africa, **Sithole Mbang**, CEO of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), brought the conversation back to the realities of climate impacts and municipal balance sheets. Extreme events, he said, are no longer episodic. “In the last four months, around six out of nine provinces have been impacted,” citing fires and floods and warning that the consequences are financial as much as humanitarian. “If we are to fund the New Urban Agenda... we’re going to have to think about how we finance the work that we’re doing as local government.”

That financing theme resurfaced in the open floor discussion, where several participants argued that large investment strategies still tend to treat local institutions as implementers rather than partners. **Ryan Knox**, Managing Director of SALAR International, pointed to top-down approaches to infrastructure and green transition funding, including the EU’s Global Gateway, and suggested that the New Urban Agenda could serve as a political bridge into those debates. Localisation, he argued, needs to become a condition of financing frameworks—because delivery ultimately happens at the local level.

Housing emerged as the session’s sharpest fault line. **Camila Cociña** of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) urged participants to keep a rights-based lens at the centre of the New Urban Agenda follow-up—one that reflects the breadth of what municipalities actually do, from data collection and regulation to shaping markets and, at times, direct provision.

Local and regional governments, she argued, carry responsibilities linked to “the recognition, the protection and the fulfilment of the right to adequate housing”. She also raised a politically sensitive issue gaining urgency across regions: forced evictions. “Forced evictions nowadays are fuelled by climate change, but also sometimes justified through climate arguments,” she warned, noting that displacement can deepen vulnerability even when framed as risk reduction.

For **Sébastien Vauzelle**, Head of the UN Local2030 Coalition Secretariat, the upcoming New Urban Agenda review comes “at the right moment”, but he urged a shift in posture—from insisting on local relevance to demonstrating local impact. “Now is the time to show the differentiated impact of bottom-up approaches,” he said, calling for a stronger focus on action, results and financing to scale what is already working. He framed 2026 as a pivotal “year for cities”, linking the housing focus at the World Urban Forum, the SDG 11 review at the High-Level Political Forum and the runway towards post-2030 negotiations.

The open floor repeatedly returned to the question of power—and, specifically, the uneven legal mandates under which mayors operate. **Eckart Würzner**, Mayor of Heidelberg and Chair of the UN Forum of Mayors, argued that global expectations often ignore basic governance realities. “If you are not empowered as a mayor by a legal framework, you do not have the responsibility to deliver services,” he said, pointing to differences in competencies over energy, water and housing that determine what cities can actually do. The implication, he added, is structural: “National governments have to give up power to local governments.”

Moderating the discussion, **Neila Akrimi**, Advisor for International Relations at the Arab Towns Organization, pressed participants to be blunt about what has, and has not, translated into change over the past decade of New Urban Agenda implementation. “Has political recognition translated into structural reform? Has reporting translated into influence? And has localization translated into redistribution of power and resources?” With post-2030 localisation discussions approaching, she suggested the movement may need to “move from consolidation to repositioning”, shifting from defending gains to reshaping political strategies in a more contested global environment.



In her final intervention, UCLG Secretary-General **Emilia Saiz** offered a frank assessment. Localisation has gained traction, she said, but key political battles have lost momentum. “The whole decentralisation story and the whole multilevel governance story are being left behind.” On housing, she was even more direct: “We have failed miserably on the housing agenda.”

Akrimi wrapped up the discussion with a set of questions she urged participants to carry forward as a compass: “Where have we settled? Where have we adapted to constraints instead of challenging them? And where do we need to be more strategic?”



THE POST-2030 AGENDA REIMAGINED



What happens after 2030—and what kind of multilateral system will local and regional governments be operating in by 2036, when the New Urban Agenda is next reviewed?

That question framed the final session of the second day of the UCLG Retreat, where participants were asked to imagine four possible futures: a continuation of the current global framework, a renewed one, a fragmented system of regional or sectoral arrangements, or a world with no shared framework at all. The exercise was not about prediction, but preparation: clarifying positions, identifying allies and testing how the emerging Local Social Covenant might guide local action in uncertain global conditions.

For Spain's Director-General for the 2030 Agenda, **David Perejil**, the message was to avoid fatalism. "We are a decentralised country and it's not always easy," he said. "But this is a unique opportunity to reflect together on global public goods and the shared responsibilities we face." He warned that the principle of "leave no one behind" is under pressure and called for stronger alliances grounded in a feminist care perspective. Spain's own new sustainable development strategy, with 100 actions—75 of them going beyond the SDGs—was cited as an attempt to keep equity and care central to the post-2030 transition.

Perejil outlined three priorities: stay focused on delivery to 2030, begin shaping post-2030 content now, and reclaim the political meaning of "leave no one behind" as a rights-based commitment that addresses climate, economic and

gender inequalities. "Let's continue working between now and 2030—that's most important," he said. "But we also need to start adding localised demands into what comes next."

Questions of trust and political credibility ran through the session. **Eckart Würzner**, Mayor of Heidelberg and Chair of the UN Forum of Mayors, argued that local leadership will matter even more in a fragmented global system. "Nearly everybody trusts local leaders," he said. "After 2030, it's not just about frameworks. It's about who people trust." He also challenged local government networks to sharpen their political communication. "If our concerns are not in the media, if they're not in newspapers like *The New York Times* or *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, then we're not communicating strongly enough."

For UCLG Secretary-General **Emilia Saiz**, the risk is not only fragmentation, but resignation. "We shouldn't assume that frameworks won't exist," she said. The SDGs, she argued, have provided three things that should not be lost: a shared political language, momentum on climate finance, and accountability tools. Rather than waiting for a renewed framework, she urged local governments to demonstrate impact now—showing what investments they make and how many people they serve. "Development will only work through a new generation of public service delivery," she said.

The session's futures exercise brought together perspectives on multilateralism, finance, trust and feminism. **María Fernanda Espinosa**, Executive Director

of GWL Voices, framed the broader geopolitical moment as one of transition rather than collapse. “Multilateralism is collaboration, solidarity and collective action for the common good,” she said. But she warned that legitimacy and performance gaps are widening, calling for a system that looks more like the societies it is meant to serve, anchored in local power and delivery capacity.

Other interventions sharpened the thematic stakes. **Aromar Revi**, Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, argued that post-2030 debates will need to tackle global finance architecture if cities are to deliver at scale. **Lauren Banham** of Stop Ecocide International focused on trust and accountability as prerequisites for any renewed framework. **Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu** of International IDEA brought a feminist democracy lens, insisting that inclusion, representation and care must be structural features of future governance—not add-ons.

The session closed on cautious optimism. Even in scenarios of fragmentation or weak global coordination, participants argued that local and regional governments remain uniquely positioned to anchor trust, deliver services and defend rights. As **Espinosa** put it, “We are here because we believe in collective action for the common good.” **Würzner** echoed the sentiment more plainly: “We believe in the future. Let’s stay together. Let’s find concrete action with our neighbours.”



FOUR FUTURES AFTER 2030: *What they mean for cities*

These are some of the reflections in the room as participants explored what the post-2030 landscape could look like for cities.

If today’s framework continues, the task is to defend what works while pushing harder on delivery and financing.

If a new framework replaces it, local governments need to shape its content early, rather than reacting once the rules are set.

If the system fragments, cities will have to navigate multiple political tracks at once, protecting local interests across regional and sectoral arenas.

If no shared framework survives, trust, proximity and public service delivery may become the main sources of legitimacy in the absence of global coordination.

Across all four scenarios, one conclusion stood out: whatever happens to multilateralism after 2030, cities and regions will still be expected to deliver. The strategic question is whether they will do so with political backing—or in spite of its absence.

So where should cities place their bets today: on defending the current framework, shaping the next one, building alliances across fragments—or preparing to act without a shared rulebook at all?

INVESTING IN CITIES TO ACHIEVE OUR SHARED GOALS

The day's boldest proposal came from **Aromar Revi**, Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, who argued that local and regional governments need their own high-grade financial engine: a Global Municipal Development Bank, designed to be AAA-rated and capable of delivering the Pact for the Future and the SDGs through “bankable urban blueprints.”

Revi described a three-layer structure aimed at credit strength and scale. In his outline, cities would be the “owners,” with paid-in and callable capital; a select group of countries would act as “anchors” by providing sovereign guarantees; and additional “fuel” would enable bond issuance and project pipelines. The pitch emphasised speed, breaking “clearance bottlenecks” with a six-to-nine-month approval cycle, and a governance model meant to preserve local decision-making: a board with regional city directors holding voting rights, while countries would intervene only on systemic risk, not on project choices.

But Revi's most political argument was about sovereignty—specifically, the financial sovereignty of cities. He framed it through a set of rights: the ability to borrow on municipal merits, revenue ownership, digital sovereignty, and a pledge of “legal non-derogation”—the claim that a city's resources should not be arbitrarily appropriated. His bottom line: cities can become “bankable,” moving “up the elevator,” and could even see dividends within five years, creating incentives for participation.

The proposed timeline was concrete: adopt a charter, set up city audits, and “launch the first bond in 2027.” Revi also extended an invitation to a signing ceremony at the UCLG World Congress in Tangier in June 2026, placing the idea squarely within UCLG's political calendar.

Public Services International's **Daria Cibrario** cautioned against framing cities as companies, pointing to the existence of hundreds of public banks and vast public banking assets worldwide. The debate, she argued, is not only about creating new institutions, but about governance models and values. **Emilia Saiz** welcomed the ambition but named two barriers drawn from past attempts: the inclusion of smaller cities and, above all, trust. Even if “numbers may allow us to move,” she said, communities may not yet trust local governments to invest at that scale—suggesting that bold finance will only work if matched by democratic legitimacy and partnership with civil society.

Revi returned in the wrap-up with a final provocation: “We could not approve the SDGs these days.” His message to local leaders was to use UCLG's mandate, grounded in UN principles—and, as he put it, “take it and run with it.”



GLOBAL TASKFORCE ANNUAL PRINCIPALS' MEETING



On Monday, 23 February 2026, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments— networks representing local and regional governments — convened for a frank, strategy-focused retreat to assess mounting global challenges and chart a practical way forward.

Participants described a strained international context marked by democratic backsliding, polarised politics, shifting financing flows and an evolving multilateralism that increasingly relies on coalitions of the willing. Against that backdrop, they underlined both risk and opportunity: cities and regions are increasingly called upon to deliver public services, yet the constituency's institutional gains remain fragile without decisive follow-up.

A focus was the United Nations Pact for the Future, and in particular action 55e, which points to more structured engagement with local and regional governments. While the report validates the role of local and regional governments and outlines options to formalize participation, there is no automatic next step. Participants argued for urgent engagement with UN80, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) reform processes to turn the report into durable access and political influence.

Practical priorities emerged clearly: make service delivery and access to finance the core “bridge message” to national governments; strengthen national associations (the “missing middle”), so global commitments translate into national policy and budgets; and develop a short, shared messaging brief and roadmap identifying priority member-state allies and named outreach leads.

Participants also recommended a coordinated local and regional government (LRG) steering approach across the Rio Conventions (climate, biodiversity and desertification), and stressed the political importance of defending human rights, reclaiming democratic narratives through creativity and culture, and sustaining municipal diplomacy, signalling a constituency that is coming of age politically and seeking a more strategic role within global governance debates. In sum, the principals agreed on pragmatic, time-bound actions: consolidate simple, persuasive messages; expand and diversify allies; and mobilise small task teams to pursue ECOSOC and HLPF entry points, while continuing detailed strategy sessions throughout the retreat, reflecting a movement moving from recognition towards a more mature, coordinated exercise of political influence.

The tone was urgent but resolute: the moment is critical, and local governments must turn recognition into real political power to shape global decisions that affect people's daily lives.



What's on Today?

25 FEBRUARY 2026

DEMOCRACY AND PLURILATERALISM

Day 3 of the UCLG Annual Retreat turns to the political core of the municipal movement: democracy, trust and the shifting landscape of multilateralism. The morning session on New Multilateralism (10:00–12:00) explores how cities and regions can defend shared values as global cooperation becomes more fragmented and plurilateral. From 12:00 to 13:30, Trust and Leadership in the DNA of the movement brings mayors and local leaders together to reflect on participatory democracy, human rights and renewed political legitimacy. The day concludes with a hands-on workshop (15:00–17:30) on Delivering the Local Social Covenant, translating commitments on housing, climate justice, food systems and public services into local action.

CREDITS

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TRENDING NOW!

100 DAYS, TEN YEARS, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

The second day of the @uclg_org 2026 Retreat was framed around “100 Days of Local Multilateralism”. On social media, however, the discussions went much further than that.

On X (formerly Twitter), Retreat participants reflected on the rapid evolution of global governance systems. And since this section is about their voices, the best way to describe it is to quote them: “Multilateralism is being redefined in real time.” The moment has been described as “a turning point for the municipal movement,” linking the 100-day process to a broader positioning ahead of the High-Level Political Forum.

Ten years after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, the anniversary is both a celebration and an exercise in reflection. “From principles to accountability”: cities are becoming increasingly involved in monitoring and reporting frameworks, rather than simply endorsing global texts. In this rapidly shifting landscape, local governments must navigate a policy environment that is more crowded and fragmented than ever. But this complexity does not diminish the role of cities; rather, it reinforces it. “Local voices are no longer complementary. They are necessary.”

If the Sustainable Development Goals provided a common compass for the last decade, what framework (political, institutional, or narrative) will guide the next?

Several tweets provide answers. Some have spoken of reform, others of renewal, and still others of more profound structural changes in the global system. “The future is open, and local governments intend to shape it.” But for once there is consensus on X; the need for a common municipal voice in international negotiations. “Coordination is political capital”; local and regional governments can align their messages without losing territorial diversity.

As the feed filled with reflections, quotes, and one message stood out for its conciseness: “Local is global, and the clock doesn’t stop.”

With two days still to go, it’s clear that the conversation is far from over. But if yesterday’s posts are any indication, the municipal movement isn’t waiting for the future to arrive — it’s already drafting it.

#UCLGMeets #Listen2Cities



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