



Global Mayors  
Task Force on  
Climate and  
Migration



## PRESS RELEASE

### *Global Coalition of City Leaders Push for Climate Action*

# Mayors Debate Climate Migration with National and UN Officials

7 July 2021 - On Tuesday, July 6, mayors from around the world came together with representatives of national governments and UN officials at an official side event of the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (UN HLPF 2021) to discuss the pressing development challenges related to climate change and related migration in cities, as well as the interrelated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 13 (Climate Action).

The 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report reveals that land degradation is already negatively impacting the livelihoods and well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, while rising sea levels could submerge the homeland of 280 million people by the end of this century. These climate change challenges will reflect on internal and international population movements. While it is today widely recognized that environmental migration is complex and multifaceted, we also know that most people's journeys will lead them to and through cities. Mayors deal with these realities on a daily basis and are leading the charge to take action now. They convened at the HLPF to meet with national and UN leaders to identify how different levels of government can better work together and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs at a global scale.

The event was a joint initiative of several organizations working together to address climate-related migration, including the British Council under the Climate Connection programme, the C40 Cities-Mayors Migration Council Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration (C40-MMC Task Force), the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

"The relationship between diverse forms of contemporary migration patterns and trends in urbanization are complex and challenging," said **Michele Klein Solomon**, Regional Director for Central and North America and the Caribbean, International Organization for Migration (IOM). "It is therefore crucial that the international community takes urgent action to empower and enable cities to engage in migration diplomacy and policymaking and to connect this with inclusive climate action strategies and policies."

**Fiona Clouder**, COP26 Regional Ambassador for Latin America and the Caribbean, Government of the United Kingdom, said that the climate challenges are no longer something theoretical. She noted, "We need to move from thinking to actually doing and it is through partnerships like the COP26 campaign [Race to Resilience](#), where we can put people and nature first, that will actually make the difference."

**Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr**, Freetown, Sierra Leone; Co-Chair of the C40-Mayors Migration Council Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration and member of the Global Parliament of Mayors spoke about the importance of appropriate financing. She said: "We need new ways for cities to access finance for adaptation where it is most needed. As the C40-MMC Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration, we are holding ourselves

accountable by defining concrete recommendations for national governments, multilateral banks, and the private sector to expand both our mandates and financial capacity.”

**Mayor Peter Kurz**, Mannheim, Germany; Chair of the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), spoke about the work of the GPM ahead of COP26, highlighting an upcoming Call to Action on climate-related migration, which he invited mayors and city networks to join in the months ahead. Kurz noted, “We need a coalition of city leaders committed to action. And we need national governments and multilateral institutions to acknowledge the effective contributions made by the cities. We need them to open their systems for equal participation and stand together with us.”

“Huge portions of the United States, much of the South and West of this country will become uninhabitable because of climate change,” said **Brigid Shea**, Commissioner of Travis County, Texas; Chair, ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability USA (ICLEI USA). She described the impact of Winter Storm Uri in Texas, arguing: “A whole-of-government approach is only a starting point of the answer. We need to ensure that the impacts of this breakdown are addressed in an equitable fashion.”

“We are committed to working globally locally and collaboratively to confront the crisis,” noted **Marta Youth**, Deputy Assistant Secretary Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, State Department, United States. Youth spoke about U.S. President Biden’s priorities ahead of COP26 and said: “We are committed to working across all levels and with all stakeholders to address the climate crisis. Groups such as the C40-MMC Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration can often bridge the divide between governments, private sector, and civil society.”

**Anare Leweniqila**, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations in Geneva and Chair of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), described the urgency of the situation in Fiji: “One thing is to have a good strategy, but a good strategy needs a funding mechanism.” Leweniqila concluded, “We will work at all levels of governments, including with the Mayors Migration Council, to ensure disaster displacement is part of the COP26 agenda”.

In his closing remarks, **Andrew Harper**, Special Advisor on Climate Action, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), highlighted the importance of hearing from mayors at the event. He noted, “We should listen more to the communities on the ground. It is only when you speak to the people on the front line of the emergency that you get a feeling of the urgency. I hope at COP26, and at other discussions, that we do understand that it is real. What we are talking about is the human face of climate emergency.” He continued, “It is not only climate change, but how climate change is exaggerating other mega trends, including urbanisation and changes in livelihoods.”

The mayors’ leadership on climate and forced migration will continue after the event. Members of the Global Parliament of Mayors are currently drafting a Call to Action, which they will invite other city leaders around the world and global city networks to sign ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) to be held in Glasgow in November 2021. Building on this momentum, the C40-MMC Task Force is developing a mayor-led Action Agenda with ambitious city actions to actualise the GPM’s Call to Action, and concrete policy recommendations for national and regional governments, central banks and international financial institutions to support cities in this effort.

#UnitedMayors demand – and deserve – a seat at the table where policy and investment decisions around climate migration are made. Only through a real multi-level governance and specific financing mechanisms will the international community be able to address these pressing development challenges.

## Notes for Editor

-For more information on the British Council and the Climate Connection programme: [www.britishcouncil.org/climateconnection](http://www.britishcouncil.org/climateconnection) or contact [jeanne.leong@britishcouncil.org.sg](mailto:jeanne.leong@britishcouncil.org.sg)

-For more information on the C40-MMC Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration: <https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/c40-mmc-tf> or contact Giovanni Pagani, Senior Manager for Climate Migration, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, [gpagani@c40.org](mailto:gpagani@c40.org).

-For more information on the Global Parliament of Mayors and the project Uniting Mayors: Local Solutions to Global Climate Challenges: [www.globalparliamentofmayors.org/unitingmayors/](http://www.globalparliamentofmayors.org/unitingmayors/) or contact Caroline Schep, Executive Director GPM Secretariat, [caroline.schep@denhaag.nl](mailto:caroline.schep@denhaag.nl).

### ***British Council and The Climate Connection***

The [British Council](http://www.britishcouncil.org) is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

The Climate Connection is the British Council's global platform for dialogue, cooperation and action against climate change. It connects millions of people from the UK and the rest of the world through collaborative and creative solutions to the climate crisis. Young people, policymakers, artists, scientists, teachers, students, early career researchers, academics and business and community leaders from across the British Council's global network are collaborating to tackle climate change. Millions more can connect online to discover opportunities for dialogue, debate and action. The Climate Connection engages people through three interconnected activity strands in the arts, education and English sectors: engaging young people, engaging leaders and policymakers, and engaging the public.

### ***C40 Cities-Mayors Migration Council Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration (C40-MMC Task Force)***

The [C40 Cities](http://www.c40cities.org) (C40) and the [Mayors Migration Council](http://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org) (MMC) [Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration](http://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/global-mayors-task-force-on-climate-and-migration) is a mayor-led initiative to address the impact of the climate crisis on migration in cities, inspired by C40's Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force.

Mayors deal with the realities of climate change and migration on a daily basis. This includes protecting residents from extreme heat, wildfires, flooding, or landslides, and welcoming people displaced by climate impacts domestically or internationally. Mayors are also setting the global agenda in promoting climate justice and leaving no one behind in the green transition. To date, their efforts have been delivered with limited resources and fragmented policy and financing regimes.

The C40-MMC Task Force will drive forward an Action Agenda in partnership with migrant and refugee community leaders, business leaders, and experts to be presented at the United Nations Climate Conference (COP26) in November 2021 in dialogue with national and regional counterparts. The C40-MMC Task Force is co-led by the Mayor of Dhaka North, Bangladesh and the Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone and includes as members the Mayors of Barcelona, Spain; Bristol, United Kingdom; Dakar, Senegal; Houston, United States; Lima, Peru; Los Angeles, United States; and Milan, Italy.

### ***Global Parliament of Mayors***

The [Global Parliament of Mayors](http://www.globalparliamentofmayors.org) (GPM) is a governance body of, by and for mayors from all continents with a vision of the world in which Mayors, their cities and networks are equal

partners in building global governance for an inclusive and sustainable world. The mission of the GPM is to facilitate the debate between mayors, national governments and international organisations, drive systematic action to take on global and national challenges and opportunities to achieve political change on a global scale. Mayors take leadership and ownership of the global challenges that they face on a local level.

In partnership with the British Council the GPM has developed the project [“Uniting Mayors: Local Solutions to Global Climate Challenges”](#). The project brings together mayors and communities worldwide to explore the impact of climate change - particularly on communities in low lying areas in the Global South - and to share ideas and collaborate on city solutions and response strategies. City leaders have a vital role to play in responding to this challenge – both in terms of helping their cities to become carbon neutral and deal with the effects of climate change, and in terms of dealing with climate displacement and migration. The main output of the project is a mayoral ‘Call to Action’ that will be published prior to COP26.

### ***International Organization for Migration (IOM)***

Established in 1951, [IOM](#) is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. It works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration challenges and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people. In the environment and climate change field, IOM has been at the forefront of operational, research, policy and advocacy efforts, seeking to bring environmental migration to the heart of international, regional and national concerns in collaboration with Member States and partners.

### ***UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)***

[UNHCR](#), the UN Refugee Agency, works in 135 countries to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee. Together with partners and communities, we work to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country. UNHCR is providing protection and assistance to many refugees and other people displaced by the effects of climate change, as well as helping them increase their resilience to future disasters and secure lasting solutions.