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PRESS RELEASE

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Subnational governments and cities play leading role in taking action towards achieving the targets of the GBF

[The 8th Summit for Subnational Governments & Cities](#) was opened yesterday with a powerful statement by Alejandro Eder, Mayor of Cali, Colombia, urging reconciliation with nature.

“As Mayor of Cali, it’s an honor to be host of this historic moment, at a crucial point in time, in which nature is asking us to take important measures,” he said. “It’s not a choice, but an imperative need, and not one that falls to a single country or government. Our planet is demanding we do more – and cities are at the center of this discussion. Cities are, and will be, the epicenter of change: We have the creativity, talent and will to protect our planet, starting right here in cities.”

The Summit, held in the COP16 Blue Zone, as an official parallel event to the COP, welcomed over 1,200 delegates from cities and regions across 81 countries. Their message was clear: The time for talk is over—we need to partner in order to scale up implementation, and we need to make peace with nature now!

Under the themes of Partnering, Progress and Peace, more than 245 governors, mayors and other subnational government leaders from across the globe engaged directly on critical issues related to financing, implementation and reporting, with national leaders, their key stakeholders and partners.

“Our call today is to open our minds and hearts to ask the difficult questions,” said Susana Muhamad, COP16 President and Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia. “There is no more challenging time than now for governance, but the power of the local level is critical”.

“Local and subnational governments want to take responsibility for the protection, conservation and restoration of biodiversity,” said Dilian Francisca Toro Torres, Governor of Valle del Cauca. “However, we often lack the necessary financial resources. Valle del Cauca is already working to meet 17 targets of the GBF. At this COP, we want to highlight the need for resource access at the subnational and local levels, as it is us—cities and regions—who hold and care for biodiversity.”

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity applauded the Summit as a true demonstration of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. “We hope that you will inspire more subnational governments to take action and make peace with nature. The challenge is to connect and collaborate and go further. We need to go further and we need to go fast!” she said.

The Summit also received powerful endorsement and support from the following esteemed leaders, who delivered strong messages stressing the urgency to act, the need for collaboration and a whole-of-government approach, the critical importance of connecting to other Conventions, as well as the need for more direct access to finance at subnational level:

- United Cities and Local Governments: Ana Lucia Reis, Co-President of UCLG
- Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy: Gregor Robertson, Special Envoy for Cities in CHAMP and Global Ambassador, Global Covenant of Mayors
- European Committee of the Regions: Roby Biwer, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and Councillor of Bettembourg, Luxembourg
- Associação Brasileira de Entidades Estaduais de Meio Ambiente: Mauren Lazzaretti, ABEMA President and Secretary for the Environment, Mato Grosso State, Brazil
- United Arab Emirates: H.E. Dr. Amna Al Dahak, Minister of Climate Change and Environment of the UAE, on behalf of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi
- Colombia: Luis Gilberto Murillo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Colombia.

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility made his sentiments clear: “In order to achieve progress in the implementation of the Biodiversity Accord, we need to promote a new paradigm in multilateral negotiations. Non-state actors and subnational governments are part of the solution and should receive direct funding.”

“Cities are hubs of innovation and solutions, they are drivers of change, they are where implementation happens at ground level,” said Kobie Brand, Deputy Secretary General of ICLEI, the largest global subnational government network focused on promoting and taking action towards sustainable development. “That is why we are so encouraged to see 73 new cities and regions joining our [CitiesWithNature](#) and [RegionsWithNature](#) global partnership initiatives since COP15.”

CitiesWithNature and RegionsWithNature are recognized in the SCBD Decision 15/12 as the platform for local and subnational governments to report on, and track progress against, their commitments to contributing to the implementation of the GBF and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Currently, over 350 cities and regions from 77 countries have joined these initiatives, with Beijing, capital city of the Peoples’ Republic of China, being the 350th.

Several Chinese cities that have made extraordinary efforts in advancing local biodiversity initiatives were recognized for Biodiversity Charming Cities Best Practices. These cities are Anji City, Beijing City, Beilun District of Ningbo City, Lishui City, Ninghe District of Tianjin City, Ordos City, Shaoxing City, Shiyan City and Xiamen City, joining an initial group of six major Chinese cities awarded this accolade at COP15.

Alfredo Coro, Mayor of Del Carmen Philippines and Political Lead of ICLEI’s Biodiversity Portfolio implored all cities and regions to join the initiatives. “The future of our planet is dependent on local actors,” he said. “We must recognize the value of nature. We must make peace with nature.”

ABEMA, the Brazilian Association of State Environmental Entities, has heeded this call, with a historic announcement at the Summit that all the States of Brazil are joining RegionsWithNature, marking the first country in which all the states are signing up to this important initiative.

Jordan Harris, Executive Director of Regions4, highlighted the vital role that regions play in contributing to global biodiversity goals, when he launched the RegionsWithNature Action Platform, together with ICLEI, as a sister platform to CitiesWithNature, but specifically tailored to the unique needs of regions. He also thanked the Government of Quebec, as one of the founders of RegionsWithNature, for its financial partnership with RegionsWithNature to propel the platform to

its full potential.

“As Regions4 President, Scotland will focus on building momentum—to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, across our international network,” said John Swinney MSP, First Minister of Scotland. “It is only by realizing the full potential of devolved governments, states and regions, that we will be successful in achieving the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.”

During the Summit, the Government of Quebec continued to demonstrate its strong commitment to contributing to the implementation of the GBF by making the world’s first contribution by a subnational government to the Biodiversity Framework Fund.

"The GBF is only a piece of paper if we don't turn it into action," said Jean Lemire, Envoy for Climate Change, Northern and Arctic Affairs for the Government of Quebec.

Quebec was also one of the first subnational governments to unveil its 2030 strategic Nature Plan at COP16.

“The plan will be accompanied by a record budget of 922 million Canadian dollars to protect Quebec’s nature and biodiversity,” said Jacob Martin Malus, Assistant Deputy Minister for Biodiversity, Wildlife and Parks, Quebec.

The Government of Quebec also funded Plaza Quebec at COP16, a vibrant space for all of the Major Groups, including subnational and local authorities, to hold dynamic sessions and discussions for the full two weeks of the COP.

In a provocative opening statement on the Summit session on Progress, Dr Debra Roberts, former Co-chair, IPCC Working Group II, and Professor Willem Schermerhorn, Chair in Open Science from a Majority World Perspective at the University of Twente, painted a vivid picture of the stark reality of climate change, but said: “I urge you to take the climate warnings not as a footnote of doom, but as a call to do more. We have to put our hands to work—and we need extraordinary work to face the disruptive challenges we are going to face.”

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of Natural Resources, California, United States, in announcing California’s commitment to preserving ecosystem connectivity, referenced the devastating impacts of climate change: “We represent the fifth largest economy in the world. We are also a biodiversity hotspot, but we suffer from wildfire, droughts and sea level rise,” he said. “We have, however, passed a legally enforceable state law that demands the preservation of 30% of California lands and waters, bringing 30x30 home. We have also passed laws to integrate wildlife connectivity into new transportation infrastructure. We are now also making a public commitment to spend \$1.2 billion in achieving 30x30.”

A strategic action by Vanessa Grazziotin, Executive Director of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and Rodrigo Perpetuo, Regional Secretary of ICLEI South America, saw a letter of intent being signed at COP16 between ICLEI and ACTO to unite and build upon the efforts already made by both organizations to promote even more robust actions for sustainable development in the Amazon region. The objectives of this newly strengthened partnership include the joint formulation of a work plan that mobilizes actions aligned with relevant regional and international themes, seeking strategic partnerships to promote institutional cooperation in the region, and outlining strategies for securing funding for projects.

The 8th Summit for Subnational Governments & Cities was co-hosted by ICLEI, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Regions4, along with the host Government of Colombia and the City of Cali. The main sponsor of the 8th Summit was CAF, and co-sponsors were DAI and Veolia.

Other key launches and announcements at the 8th Summit included:

ICLEI launched the publication [From Agreement to Action: Implementation progress by subnational and local governments towards the Global Biodiversity Framework](#). This publication provides a valuable snapshot of initiatives, actions, programs and projects being implemented by cities—big and small—district authorities, provinces, states and prefectures around the world to contribute to the 2030 targets in the GBF.

[The Berlin Urban Nature Pact](#) is an initiative for cities ready to lead the transition towards implementation of bold biodiversity action. The Pact seeks to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet in cities worldwide by 2030.

The [UNEP State of Finance for Nature in Cities 2024 report: From Grey to Green: Better data to finance nature in cities](#) highlights the need for better data and tools to help cities integrate Nature-based Solutions (NbS) into their financial and planning frameworks. The report showcases how investments in urban nature can support cities in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation, with global NbS financing needing to rise from USD 200 billion to USD 542 billion by 2030.

[Journeys for Life](#), an initiative launched by ICLEI and supporting the objectives of the Convention on Migratory Species, welcomed its first cohort of cities including Seattle, Barranquilla, Cocody and Varzaneh. Journeys for Life is a platform for cities that are located along migratory routes of specific migratory species, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices. The announcement was welcomed by Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals.

Musonda Mumba, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands, announced that newly accredited [Wetland Cities](#) will be announced at a special high-level event during the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands which will take place in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe in July 2025. Since its inception, a total of 43 cities have been granted Wetland City Accreditation.

Following the resounding success of the 2022 and 2024 editions, the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH) announced the [AIPH World Green City Awards](#) 2026 edition, and extended an invitation to all cities to showcase and celebrate their innovative action in urban greening through AIPH global networks.

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