



The UN & You

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN – SEPTEMBER 2019

Civil Society Conference focuses on inclusivity

The 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference was held in Salt Lake City, Utah Aug. 26–28, with the theme “building inclusive and sustainable cities and communities.” This theme attempted to amplify the importance of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: “to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030.” There were more than 4,000 participants from over 100 countries, of which 40 percent were under the age of 32, indicating the importance given to the participation of youth.

The question is: How can we make sure that cities become more inclusive, with a smaller environmental footprint, and leave no one behind? Currently 55 percent (around 4 billion) of the global population live in cities, and by 2030, 60 percent of humanity will be living in urban areas. Thirty percent of this urban population lives in slums, lacking all basic amenities. Rapid urbanization is putting enormous pressure on fresh water supplies, sewers, environment, and public health.

This reality is forcing cities to be in the forefront to find sustainable solutions to poverty and hunger, inadequate housing, education and health care, clean water and sanitation, energy, environmental degradation and climate change, infrastructure, transportation, migration, violence and gender equality. In the [outcome statement](#), civil society activists underscored the need to understand cities and communities as central to the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, and highlighted the importance of inclusivity, peace, family, education, youth, and the empowerment of women and girls. It has to be done in collaboration with all stakeholders, built on shared values and on an ethical framework. Maruxa Cardama, chairperson of the conference, stated: “We cannot conceive of a United Nations that is talking about the challenges of humankind that relate to sustainability, without involv-



ing civil society.” Maria Fernanda Espinosa, UN General Assembly president who was present on the last day, said: “Partnerships with civil society and youth are essential for a future that leaves no one behind.”

Although the focus of the conference was on “Inclusive Cities and Communities,” the deliberations during the conference and the outcome document recognized “the interdependence of rural and urban prosperity, as well as the need to address the specific conditions of mountainous areas and Small Island Developing States.”

The conference ensured that youth had a large say in the proceedings, holding a co-chair on nearly all planning sub-committees and developing a separate outcome document: [Youth Climate Compact](#), which declares that the world is nearing the point of no return from which life on the planet can recover, and that it is time for youth to “unite in action against the climate crisis, harnessing their collective power to construct a future free of the devastation of the climate crisis.”

Links:

- [68th United Nations Civil Society Conference Outcome Statement](#)
- [Youth Climate Compact](#)
- [Press Release](#)