



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Contact: Megan MacInnes, [MMacInnes@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:MMacInnes@cityhall.nyc.gov)

**International Affairs Commissioner Abeywardena Announces Major Milestone for  
NYC Declaration on the Voluntary Local Review**

***- More than 200 local governments, including the State of Pará in Brazil, now have  
committed to accelerating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals -***

NEW YORK – Mayor's Office for International Affairs Commissioner Penny Abeywardena announced today that 208 local governments have committed to the Voluntary Local Review Declaration, including the State of Pará in Brazil which represents [144 municipalities](#).

Commissioner Abeywardena made the announcement during the webinar, Global Vision | Urban Action: Collaborating for a Stronger Future. The online convening on public health, hosted by International Affairs, marks the first in a series of conferences dedicated to bringing subnational leaders together to share ideas on addressing global challenges.

"This is an incredible milestone for the Voluntary Local Review movement. But it is also coming at a time when cities around the world, including New York City, are grappling with COVID-19. By joining the Voluntary Local Review Declaration, local governments can use the Global Goals as a roadmap to create a more equitable future in the aftermath of the pandemic," **said Penny Abeywardena, Commissioner for the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs.**

"I decided to join the VLR movement because it values the efforts of subnational governments that, like Pará, adopt Agenda 2030 as a guide for planning integrated public policies to face the challenges experienced by global society. Whether social, environmental, economic or institutional," **said Helder Zahluth Barbalho, Governor of the State of Pará, Brazil.**

The Voluntary Local Review, created by New York City in 2018, is a platform by which local governments can exchange best practices on addressing global crises unfolding in their communities. Modeled on the Voluntary National Reviews submitted by UN member states, it also serves as a pathway for local and regional governments to showcase their progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to the UN. The Declaration was launched in September 2019 during the UN General Assembly.

"As we navigate the unprecedented public health crisis presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, local government leadership has never been so critical. The Voluntary Local Review provides an

important opportunity to showcase cities' innovations, challenges and overall progress in realizing a more sustainable future. UN-Habitat is committed to supporting local and regional governments in their COVID-19 response, recovery measures, and efforts to build back stronger," **said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat.**

The Voluntary Local Review is a non-binding agreement that encourages signatories to identify how their existing strategies align with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, provide at least one forum for stakeholders to exchange best practices using the SDG framework, and submit a Voluntary Local Review to the UN during the High-Level Political Forum.

In addition to the State of Pará, the cities of Kabul in Afghanistan, New Taipei City in Taiwan, Turku and Espoo in Finland, Honiara in Solomon Islands and the Brazilian cities of São Paulo, Taquari and Afogados de Ingazeira also recently signed on to the NYC Declaration.

"It is important to engage local governments to convert international agendas into concrete public policies. In the city of São Paulo, the Sustainable Development Goals are by law a guideline for our municipal policies. Furthermore, a municipal commission for the SDGs was created recently to involve different sectors of society in the implementation of this Agenda. São Paulo joins this initiative as another step towards our commitment to promote economic development policies associated with the enhancement of social and environmental causes," **said Bruno Covas, Mayor of São Paulo, Brazil.**

"The city of Espoo is the Most Sustainable City in Europe. Our goal in the Espoo Story is that the development is economically, ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable. VLR is an excellent vehicle for us to review, design and implement our strategy with the citizens for the future as well," **said Jukka Mäkelä, Mayor of the City of Espoo, Finland.**

"In a post-pandemic world, SDGs are needed more than ever to guide cities on the way to the New Normal. As the world continues fighting and recovering from COVID-19, New Taipei will share with, learn from and be inspired by our international partner cities in implementing SDGs, and let hope and solidarity be the antidote," **said Yu-ih Hou, Mayor of New Taipei City, Taiwan.**

"Cities carry a big responsibility in reaching the 2030 goals. For the city of Turku, its long history at the shores of the Finnish Archipelago has taught the importance of sustainable development and it drives us to being climate neutral in our 800th anniversary year 2029 and climate positive after that. Our work with the Voluntary Local Review is an important step in evaluating our sustainability work and also in creating a framework to tell about our progress to our citizens and other cities. Together we will make our cities safe, sustainable and attractive!" **said Minna Arve, Mayor of Turku, Finland.**

"Partnerships are critical to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been a wonderful honor to collaborate with colleagues in NYC and around the world to translate our collective visions into action for the benefit of people. We call on other local governments to join us in this movement as a way of ensuring no one is left behind and to build strong engagements between local governments that transcends borders," **said Aissata M.B. Camara, Deputy Commissioner for Operations and Strategic Partnerships, NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs**

"It has been incredible connecting to local governments around the world on ways we can use the SDGs as a framework to build a more equitable and resilient future. The commitment of our new

VLR signatories, especially during the challenges of COVID-19, highlights how the Voluntary Local Review continues to bring subnational governments together to tackle both local and global issues,” **said Oneika Pryce, Strategic Relationships Associate, Global Vision| Urban Action, NYC Mayor’s Office for International Affairs**

To learn more about the Voluntary Local Review Declaration and to join the movement, visit our website: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/international/programs/voluntary-local-review-declaration.page>

### **About the Mayor’s Office for International Affairs**

The New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs works to foster positive relations and encourage collaboration between the international community and New York City's agencies and local neighborhoods. The Office is focused on sharing New York City's policies and best practices globally, as well as responding to requests from foreign governments, the United Nations, and the U.S. Department of State. For more information, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and on our website.