

# HRH The Prince of Wales calls for collective action on sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth

70% of global carbon emissions attributable to cities

Commonwealth forecast to account for 50% of the growth in cities to 2050



From left: Mayor Marvin Rees, HE Saida Muna Tasneem, HRH The Prince of Wales, Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, Mr Peter Oborn

At a high-level event convened on the eve of COP26 by The Prince's Foundation and key Commonwealth partners, participants considered ways in which the Commonwealth can respond to the 'triple threat' of climate change, rapid urbanisation and the Covid-19 pandemic, and the need for collaboration if the targets are to be met within the limited time now available.

The discussion centred on the *Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation across the Commonwealth*, a joint initiative of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth Association of Architects, the Commonwealth Association of Planners and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda and The Prince's Foundation.

The Call to Action was circulated to Commonwealth Heads of Government in February 2021, highlighting the issues facing the Commonwealth and urging the need for collective inter-disciplinary action to place climate conscious urban planning and management at the heart of the response to climate change. The Commonwealth, with its many shared systems and structures, has the opportunity to lead and model collaborative, inclusive and effective action on sustainable urbanisation, which will be a key priority for CHOGM in Kigali in 2022.

Cities already consume more than two thirds of the world's energy and account for more than 70% of all carbon emissions. From 2015 to 2050, the world's urban population is expected to almost double, and based on current trends of urban sprawl and unplanned settlements, could mean a tripling of the urban land mass, crushing often fragile eco-systems in the process. Almost 50% of that global urban growth is projected to be in the Commonwealth – well over 1bn more people living in Commonwealth cities in the next 30 years. This will see increasing pressures on coastal cities, cities in small island developing states

and indeed secondary cities, many of which are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and have limited access to resources for sustainable development; with a staggering 95% of the new urban growth expected to be in Asia and Africa.

HRH, said: “Sustainable urban development is clearly critical to responding to the climate emergency. The scale of our response needs to be equal to the scale of the challenge we are facing. I sincerely hope the very essence of adding social, environmental and commercial value can help to inspire and guide our actions and responses in the weeks and months ahead.

The Commonwealth Call to Action seems to me to provide a really perfect rallying point for Commonwealth member states, central and local governments, civil society, and organisations at all levels, to come together seriously to support and deliver real and transformational change through the way that we plan and manage our cities and human settlements.”

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC said: “Tackling climate change is the defining global challenge of our times and if we can solve the challenges of urbanisation, we have a realistic chance of tackling climate change and providing a hope and a future for our world. The Commonwealth is showing leadership and taking action on creating more sustainable urban environments with collaborations at a local, national and global level from academia to business to civil society. Commonwealth citizens, especially the young are taking action, innovating, building and crafting solutions to the world’s greatest challenge. It will be the work, determination and inspiration of these pioneers that we will all rely upon for our future and so it is our responsibility now to create a social, economic and political environment in which their talents and endeavours can flourish.”

Rwandan Environment Minister, Dr Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya, said: “Rwanda’s engagement with sustainable urbanisation, and its support for the Call to Action, is fetched from the Rwanda’s Vision 2050, that prioritises sustainable and green urbanisation with the aim to achieve low-carbon development. Urbanisation must also be inclusive, with particular emphasis on gender and social protection. Rwanda’s strategic direction underscores sustainable urbanisation for the benefit of Commonwealth countries, which call for concerted effort and ambitious action.”

Marvin Rees, the Mayor of Bristol and Board Member of CLGF who moderated the discussion, said: “It is critical that we work together across all levels of government and with civil society, the private sector and academia to make our cities and towns liveable for all. Mayors have a critical leadership role in ensuring the voices of cities are heard at an international and national level. We must all understand the threat climate change poses to our cities, the critical role sustainable urbanisation can play in building resilience and reducing global carbon emissions and we must commit the global finance needed to provide the infrastructure that is needed to decarbonise. Cities and national governments need to be working more closely along with the finance sector to ensure that we can deliver on our carbon reduction commitments and the SDGs. The Commonwealth and the Call to Action offer an opportunity to get in place the governance and finance we need.”

Recognising the need for a collective response and the potential for the Commonwealth to develop solutions that are both scalable and replicable, the partners came together to develop the Call to Action, which has three main objectives:

1. To bring a greater focus to bear on sustainable urbanisation in Commonwealth policy making,
2. To mobilise the power of the Commonwealth to work in a more integrated manner across its various networks toward multi-level governance and sustainable urbanisation,
3. To develop a programme of practical action to help deliver sustainable cities and human settlements across the Commonwealth.

Joining HRH in the hybrid event were key voices from around the Commonwealth, including the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, Commonwealth Secretary General, The Executive Director of UN-Habitat Maimunah Sharif, Dr Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya the Rwandan Environment Minister, HE Saida Muna Tasneem, the Bangladeshi High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Mr Peter Oborn, Senior Vice President at the Commonwealth Association of Architects, Mr VK Madhavan, the Chief Executive of Water Aid India, Ms Astrid Hass, Council Member at Cities that Work at the International Growth Centre, Prof Eris Schoburgh from the University of the West Indies and Mr Malith Seneveriathe from the Commonwealth Association of Planners Young Planners Network. The discussion was moderated by Bristol City Mayor Marvin Rees.

Speaking after the event, the partners behind the Call to Action commented as follows:

Lucy Slack, Acting Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, said: “With nearly 50% of the projected increase in the world’s urban population by 2050 forecast to be in the Commonwealth, as the voice of local government in the Commonwealth, CLGF members believe that there has never been a more important time for members of the Commonwealth network to come together and act together on the issues of rapid urbanisation and climate change, exacerbated in the context of a global pandemic. City governments and local leaders play a pivotal role in building safe, healthy and sustainable cities and towns for all”

Kalim Siddiqui, President of the Commonwealth Association of Architects, said: “There is an urgent need for us to tackle the critical lack of capacity among built environment professionals in many of the Commonwealth countries that are urbanising most rapidly and are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, especially in the public sector and in secondary cities. The impact of unplanned and poorly planned settlements can already be seen in terms of widespread inequality, informality and vulnerability. The Commonwealth Association of Architects is committed to working with partners to develop the Call to Action into a programme of practical action that will have real impact on the ground.”

Dr Joanna Newman MBA FRSA, Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, said: “The Association of Commonwealth Universities is a global network of 500 member universities in 50 countries, dedicated to building a better world through higher education. Universities are helping to tackle the issues of rapid urbanisation and climate change highlighted by the Call to Action through research, education and policy engagement. They are also central to the need for interdisciplinary action – by working together with communities, governments and the built environment professions, universities are able to drive evidence-based policymaking into practice, creating a more sustainable future for us all.”

Eleanor Mohammed, President of the Commonwealth Association of Planners, said: “The Commonwealth Association of Planners believes in order to achieve the elements of the Call to Action, governments at all levels, the professions, academia, and technical experts must work together. We also must take a human centred, nature-based, and climate action approach that reflects the needs, cultures, and well-being of all the world’s citizens. We represent over 40,000 professional planners from 27 countries globally and have a dedicated Youth Network which is particularly important in the context of sustainable urbanisation considering that 60% of the population of the Commonwealth are under 30.”

Jeremy Cross, Associate Director (International) for The Prince’s Foundation, said: “The Prince’s Foundation provides holistic solutions to challenges facing the world today. It champions a sustainable approach to how we live our lives and build our communities - in ways that respect the natural environment and help to reduce many of the key drivers of climate change. In that context, The Prince’s Foundation’s Rapid Planning Toolkit helps achieve the objectives of the Call To Action as a practical resource used by city mayors, leaders and key departments in more than ten countries across four continents to assist them in expanding cities in a sustainable, responsible way.”

**END**



**Statement issued by the partners to  
the Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation in the Commonwealth, 11 November 2021**  
For details on the Call to Action, visit: <https://commonwealthsustainablecities.org/calltoaction/>  
For further information contact [info@commonwealthsustainablecities.org](mailto:info@commonwealthsustainablecities.org)

## NOTES

The Call to Action is an initiative of four Commonwealth organisations:

- **The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)** is an international organisation dedicated to building a better world through higher education. It has over 500 member universities in more than 50 countries. For more information, visit [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk)
- **The Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA)** is a membership organisation for professional bodies representing architects in Commonwealth countries to promote co-operation for ‘the advancement of architecture in the Commonwealth’ <https://www.comarchitect.org/>
- **The Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP)** is a dynamic institution promoting professional planning as a fundamental part of sustainable human settlement. In 2020, CAP celebrates its 50 years of advancing professional planning globally. <https://www.commonwealth-planners.org/>
- **The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)** is a membership organisation, providing the voice for local government. Members comprise individual cities and local governments, national and regional local government associations, central government ministries, academics and professional organisations. Core work includes advocacy, programmes, networks and knowledge sharing; priorities are promoting democracy, good governance and decentralisation; localising and working towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals – in particular sustainable development and urbanisation, including climate change and health, promoting local economic development and the political and economic empowerment of women. [www.clgf.org.uk](http://www.clgf.org.uk)

working in partnership with the Princes’ Foundation and the Government of Rwanda.