Global Greens Congress, Sao Paulo
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Declaration on Sustainable Cities
Final Draft

We, the representatives of green parties from more than 80 countries at the Global Greens Congress 2008 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, agree the following declaration for the development of sustainable cities.

1
Today, more than 50% of the world's population live in cities. By 2025 this figure will reach 60%. While New York and Tokyo were the only cities with more than 10 million inhabitants in 1950, today there are more than 20 mega cities, most of them in the southern hemisphere. This ongoing urbanisation causes serious social dislocation and ecological problems but it can also provide the opportunity for a better future. Towns and cities are consuming roughly 80% of global resources and generate the bulk of the world's CO_2 emissions. They are one of the main sources of our planet's ecological crisis.

At the same time, in most cities the gap between rich and poor is growing, undermining their social coherence and the spirit of shared citizenship. It has been estimated that one third of the world's urban dwellers live in areas where people cannot secure key necessities such as clean water, sanitation or durable housing – an alarming indication of growing social inequality. Social disintegration is also reflected in the physical structure of the cities and in growing concern about crime and violence.

Despite that, cities are still the center of democracy. They foster peaceful interaction between citizens of different origin, religion and lifestyle, enable a vibrant cultural life and drive social and economic innovation.

2
Sustainable city development requires balancing the equilibrium between cities and the ecosystem as well as between cities and rural areas. Today cities are exercising enormous pressure on the countryside, by occupying ever more green lands, absorbing all kind of resources from rural areas and using it as a dump for urban

emissions and waste. Sustainable cities must reduce their ecological footprint, by becoming more self-reliant and resource-efficient.

3
Cities must be the nexus of sustainable development.
Cities have the potential to play a key role in the battle against climate change. The Utopian view of *zero emission cities* is possible. At the same time, cities must promote the social integration and political participation of all their inhabitants. Without improving the conditions of the poor and involving all citizens in future developments, there will be no solution to the crisis. Cities need policies that combat urban sprawl and fight social, economic and cultural disintegration. The policies must improve the quality of life for the population in general, protect non-commercial spaces and public property from private exploitation and rebalance the equilibrium between cities and nature. Cities hold the key to solving two of mankind's most pressing problems: climate change and poverty.

4
Climate change presents one of the greatest threats to human security and sustainable affluence in the 21st century. Preventing dramatic climate change is also a question of justice. Catastrophic climate change poses a particular threat to the lives of the poor, who have done almost nothing to contribute to its cause.

Almost two third of the world's megacities are coastal cities, endangered by sea-level rise from climate change. The effects of climate change are multiplying the enormous challenges cities are facing: social polarisation; urban sprawl; overwhelming traffic; out of control energy consumption; inadequate water supply; deficient sewerage treatment and waste management. These problems are particularly serious for urban centres in developing countries.

There is still time to avert a global crisis, if we act swiftly and decisively. Public authorities, private business and civil society need to cooperate; governments must recognise their responsibilities and ensure there are mandatory regulations for the protection of natural resources; and all of us must adopt a responsible attitude to natural resources by changing our consumer patterns towards a sustainable lifestyle.

5

Besides the energy sector, cities carry the main responsibility for climate stabilisation and sustainable development. Many local authorities have already started down the path to an improved social and ecological future. Some 6400 Agenda 21 initiatives in 113 countries as well as successful networks such as the Climate Alliance demonstrate the global dynamism of this process. We see cooperation between municipal authorities, civil society and business as the way to bringing about lasting change in urban policy.

6

Cities need to free themselves from reliance on fossil fuels and nuclear energy and drastically reduce their **energy requirements**. This can only be achieved through substantial incentives to save energy, make transport and buildings more energy efficient and promote alternative energy sources. Modern technology and better insulation alone can reduce heating and cooling energy consumption by at least 50%. In many cases, the cost of investment to do this can be recouped in a relatively short time by reduced energy bills. Private investments in sustainable energy technology should be tailored to include financial incentives for low income people. New public and commercial buildings must meet the latest ecological standards. Zero emissions buildings, green roofs, water recycling, urban permaculture and vertical greenhouses should be promoted as pilot projects. As an added benefit, insulation of buildings, the installation of solar panels and water conservation systems can provide a steady increase in local employment opportunities.

7

In urban areas the **transport sector** plays a significant role in the quality of life, use of land resources and environmental balance. Forward-looking urban policies require traffic reduction measures that integrate housing, education, employment and recreation in neighbourhoods which offer all necessary services to their citizens. Greens are very much in favour of high density compact cities. Responsible regional planning will prevent urban sprawl.

In order to reduce pressure from car traffic, cities should provide affordable, reliable, safe and efficient public transport; introduce strict emission levels for vehicles, car tolls, traffic reduction policies which include car free days. Sustainable mobility management will encourage walking, cycling and the use of solarpowered vehicles.

Regulating and limiting car traffic and road freight will enhance public space in the city. Effective protection of public parks and green areas in the city is necessary to improve living conditions there.

8

Taken together these measures must and can reduce the individual CO2 emissions of city dwellers by at least 50 percent by the middle of the century. Given the uneven proportion of emissions, cities in high industrialised countries have to go beyond that goal, reducing their emissions by 80-90 percent. This will play a substantial role in climate stabilisation.

9

To combat **poverty** cities must ensure that all citizens have access to education, health care and social services. Disadvantaged areas must not be ignored or left to their own devices. Special efforts must be made to break the cycle of poverty, by improving education and enhancing social inclusion. Combating discrimination of women and effective programs to empower their economic and political participation are key strategies for social progress.

10

Democracy first emerged in towns and cities. Today, however, in many cities political participation of citizens is weak and socially fragmented. For cities to be sustainable **local democracy** needs to be revitalised. This requires open government with a competent and honest administration that operates according to the law and broad consultation that involves all the population in the development of their city. Strengthening municipal authorities and giving towns and cities the means to solve their own problems will require political and financial support from governments and parliaments. All competences should stay with the lowest effective level.

Free, fair and proportional local elections should be supplemented by decentralised, representative participation structures such as school boards or neighbourhood-councils. In particular, low income citizens need a stronger say in local policy to protect their interests. In many places grassroots organisations provide innovative solutions to pressing urban problems. A good example of this can be found in Brazil where citizens' councils and citizens' budgets have been introduced successfully.

11

As well as municipal and civil society, **business** also has a central role in promoting sustainable development. Stabilising the world's climate and reducing ecological damage to manageable proportions require nothing less than a new industrial revolution. Environmentally friendly technology, products and services are the markets of the future. In this context, towns and cities, with their potential for innovation, their combination of research institutions, businesses and qualified labour force, have an important role to play. In particular the promotion of small and medium enterprises is of great importance for urban finances and local employment. We therefore encourage partnerships between civil society, public authorities, local employers and trade unions.

City administrations should use their purchasing power to mandate ecological and social standards in all sectors where the city exerts demand.

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Taken together, these measures must and will help cities contribute significantly to climate stabilisation and ensure a better quality of life for their inhabitants. The future of the city will be green.