

## **Eröffnungsrede zur 9. Europäischen Konferenz nachhaltiger Städte und Gemeinden von Oberbürgermeister Dr. Peter Kurz**

Dear Minister President Winfried Kretschmann, Dear State Secretary Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Dear Mayor Martin Horn, Dear Deputy Lord Mayor Cheryl Jones Fur ,Dear colleagues of local and regional authorities from all over Europe

Welcome to the 9th European Conference of Sustainable Cities and Towns!

It's a pleasure to welcome you all!

Covid 19 hindered that we meet in person.

But: the global Covid 19 pandemic also raises a strong focus on the city level and on sustainability:

International organisations such as the OECD have repeatedly pointed out that an efficient, agile and communicative local level was essential for success in containing the pandemic. So cities are a decisive level of government.

And cities and towns with a diverse economy, a green environment and a socially just urban society are demonstrably more resilient. We need sustainability to overcome the crisis.

Today, more than ever, we know that there is no other way than making sustainable cities the ultimate goal, to create a sustainable economy and society - that means to undergo a transformative process and avoid social disruption.

As mayor of a highly industrialized city I'm especially aware: This is an unprecedented task and the challenge of our time:

We need to be living within the limits of our planet and stop over-consumption of its resources.

We need to ensure that our cities are based on a sustainable economy.

We need to safeguard equality and opportunities for all.

We need culture as an essential driver for social cohesion.

Cities are the places where the ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions merge.

Cities that are well designed and well managed will decrease poverty, protect citizens from the effects of climate change and boost sustainable economic development.

In the last years, societal awareness and a sense of urgency for action on climate change, loss of biodiversity and global resource depletion has risen.

This is why this conference is so important and why we decided to have it take place despite the current circumstances.

We need the change and transformation and we need it now. We need it now as cities and regions; we need it now as a European and global society.

In recent months, we have often heard that cities are at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic. While this is most certainly true, we must not forget that we have been at the forefront of the fight against climate change and for a more sustainable way of life for years. And we are convinced that global politics and agendas can only be implemented successfully when they are being localised.

Let me give you an example: In Mannheim, we interconnect global and local strategies by using the UN 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda as main reference frameworks for our strategy. This strategy, simply called "Mannheim 2030", comprises seven future topics, each with a particular goal.

Each goal is connected to the municipal budget as well as to SDG indicators to measure the progress we made in achieving the SDGs.

The Voluntary Local Review, which we presented last year to the UN, was not only meant to help us draw our first conclusions of the process but also to show the potential of cities and to inspire others.

Ladies and Gentlemen, cities and regions support global and European sustainability agendas and goals and accept their responsibility in this transformation process. European cities and regions are supportive to the objectives of the European Green Deal. We are ready to join forces with all levels of government, European Institutions, businesses, academia and citizens to become hubs for climate and development solutions.

The next three days will give us the opportunity to develop new ideas and strategies for targeted bottom-up action and change.

The timing of the conference could not be better, with the New Leipzig Charter being about to be signed and setting the direction for integrated and sustainable urban development in the years to come.

All of this will be discussed and reflected on.

I truly wish for all of us to get the most out of this conference. That we learn of inspiring strategies, new ways of thinking, innovative approaches.

That we can take it back to our towns or cities, to our institutions or associations and that it helps to become more sustainable in every aspect.

I would like to thank ICLEI Europe and the teams of the City of Mannheim for organising this event and for carrying out the decision with us to go online.

I also would like to thank the sponsors of this conference: The German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg, the European Investment Bank and the City of Aarlborg.

I would also like to thank you, decision makers, local leaders, researchers and volunteers from all over Europe for your commitment.

Because, as I said before, without you, global change is not possible.