

Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Monitoring Committee)

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Potsdam Declaration: shared commitment to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

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Following the High-level Conference "Climate action at regional and local level as contribution to human rights protection" and the Congress Monitoring Committee meeting, held in Potsdam, on 3 and 4 July 2023 respectively, the members of the Congress Monitoring Committee and the President of the Brandenburg State Parliament.

Alarmed that people, communities, ecosystems and economies around the world are suffering due to environmental destruction and degradation, biodiversity loss, energy, food and water insecurity and rising inequalities caused by global warming, continued emission of greenhouse gases and extreme weather conditions.

Deeply concerned about adverse effects of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on the exercise of human rights and particularly devastating implications for populations affected by these challenges.

Welcoming the UN General Assembly resolution 76/300 of 28 July 2022, which declared the access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a universal human right.

Bearing in mind the conclusions of the Congress report of 26 October 2022 "A fundamental right to the environment: a matter for local and regional authorities. Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government" [CG(2022)43-15final].

Convinced that all levels of government should combine efforts to address the existential threat of climate crisis to community livelihoods and fight climate degradation.

Seeking to strengthen the global response to climate change at all levels of governance in line with the goals set in international agreements and treaties, such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

Considering that the Sustainable Development Goals commit not only States, but also every single individual as well as subnational authorities given their enhanced role and responsibilities in areas related to environment protection, including but not limited to urban design, spatial planning and rural development, waste, water and energy management, transport systems, prevention of pollution and promoting a circular economy of proximity.

Mindful that good democratic governance at regional and local level is not possible without due protection of human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Highlighting that the adoption of the human rights approach to the protection of the environment and sustainable development is the shared responsibility of all levels of government.

Emphasising the urgent need in effective and systemic multilevel co-operation to progress towards Sustainable Development Goals and effective implementation of general principles of international environmental law for the benefit of humanity.

Welcoming regional and local authorities' contribution to global environmental efforts through the adoption of a wide range of measures within their remit to meet the environmental challenges.

Emphasising the key role played by regions and municipalities in reaching out to all social groups in their communities, including people in vulnerable situations, to inclusively engage them in the transformation processes aimed at combatting climate change, while duly taking into account their specific needs on the path towards sustainable development.

Affirming that this contribution strengthens the impact of the implementation of national climate policies and supports the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda through bottom-up action.

1. Declare their full commitment to the protection of human rights through good governance, sustainable development and building a safe, climate-resilient and human-centred future for regions, cities and communities;
2. Welcome the decision of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe to commit to strengthening their work on the human rights aspects of the environment, to initiate the "Reykjavik process" of strengthening the Council of Europe's work in this field, to recognise and support the vital role of cities, regions and other subnational authorities and local communities in the protection of the environment and to conclude as soon as possible the Council of Europe's consideration of the need and feasibility of a respective instrument/instruments in the field of human rights and the environment;

3. Resolve to continue assisting regional and local authorities in pursuing their efforts to limit global warming and address long-lasting effects of climate change through adaptation and mitigation policies based on human rights standards;
4. Further resolve to actively contribute to awareness-raising on human rights and climate change in order to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacities of communities, cities and regions to the effects of global warming;
5. Undertake to streamline environmental perspectives and objectives in the design of urban policies and planning at grassroots level, including by using green budgeting tools;
6. Commit to promoting a more efficient use of the existing resources and accelerating transition to sustainable development pathways at local and regional level while making sure that this transition is just, fair and provides an equal opportunity to all citizens to benefit from environmental protection programmes and actions;
7. Further commit to promoting an environmentally respectful and energy saving mode of life, clean and renewable energy and water scarcity solutions, circular economy, and substantial emissions reduction;
8. Pledge to continue their efforts to strengthen multilevel cooperation for environmental protection founded upon the respect of human rights, democratic values and principles of openness, transparency, participation, equity, diversity, inclusion, non-discrimination, accountability and accessibility;
9. Call for proactively ensuring citizens' access to relevant information and fully involving them in decision-making at grassroots level to enable and stimulate citizens' meaningful participation in environmental protection efforts and policies, notably of younger generations and people in situations of vulnerability;
10. Resolve to continue identifying common challenges and facilitating the exchange of good practices and solutions to fighting climate change among subnational authorities across Europe so that they can benefit from a large variety of experiences.

The Monitoring Committee and the President of the Brandenburg State Parliament call on the member states' delegations to the Congress to promote in their contacts with national authorities the vital need to reinvigorate common climate actions to foster a safer and healthier planet for the present and future generations.

To achieve this, national authorities should be encouraged to:

1. Support multilevel cooperation as key to combine the expertise, innovation and creativity of all levels of government and thereby accelerate the realization of Sustainable Development Goals;
2. Systematically involve regional and local authorities, including through their representatives (national associations), in the designing and implementation of national human rights and climate policies to benefit from the subnational authorities' insights into the realities on the ground;
3. Ensure sufficient financial resources, legal framework and organisational capacity to regional and local authorities to implement climate adaptation and mitigation measures, develop new tools, align subnational policies with the global sustainable development agenda and priorities and increase resilience at grassroots level to climate change impacts;
4. Increase access of communities to green technology with the aim of enabling transformation and innovation in various sectors, from energy and water management to communication;
5. Encourage and facilitate cooperation and exchange of experience between regional and local authorities in addressing climate change and greening public administrations at all levels.