

Dancing in the streets as cities fight global warming

December 18, 2009

I AM in Copenhagen with 80 mayors from cities around the world to deliver a message to national leaders on behalf of the 700 million people we represent.

Our summit communique, delivered to national leaders yesterday, affirms that the battle against climate change will be won or lost in cities.

We encourage national leaders to commit to ambitious targets with the confidence that cities will deliver if supported. The deep cuts needed to avert dangerous global warming require low-carbon cities, and action now under way can be accelerated.

At the mayors' summit, city leaders reported on innovative and practical action to reduce emissions. There is extraordinary consensus on what needs to be done.

Community representatives are increasingly being locked out of the main conference centre at a time when negotiations are stalling and delegates need to hear citizens' voices. Community consultation initiated by the Danish Board of Technology, which was conducted in 38 countries in September with 4400 randomly selected participants, found that 91 per cent of people want immediate and urgent action on climate change.

An inspiring program has been provided by the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen, Ritt Bjerregaard. We attended the opening of the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference, addressed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon. A series of mayors' roundtable discussions presented our experiences so cities can learn from each another, and our hosts launched the "Copenhagen Wheel", a hybrid bicycle that we hope to introduce to Sydney.

Yesterday we met the economist Sir Nicholas Stern, California's Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson; held a parade of new electric vehicles; and were presented with new research supporting cities' role in addressing climate change.

At a magic Earth Hour, the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen and I addressed a crowd of about 6000 in the Town Hall square amid swirling snow.

Despite the mounting tension and security difficulties around the conference centre, the sirens and the protests, it has been inspiring to see thousands of cyclists brave the weather and commute to work in the dark and the snow.

Families on the streets with babies in prams mingle with the climate activists who have flocked here, many dressed as polar bears and pandas.

The City of Copenhagen has set up a stage and a huge illuminated globe in the city centre outside the Town Hall, along with many public art installations centred on climate change messages. The city has a celebratory feel with live outdoor concerts each night. Only in Copenhagen could you see thousands dancing outdoors in subzero temperatures with their bicycles parked nearby covered in snow!

The Mayor of Seattle reported that 1016 cities across the US have agreed to meet Kyoto Protocol commitments, going further than their federal government and paving the way for their nation to go further.

With or without binding national targets, the cities of the world will continue working to reduce emissions on a significant scale.

Clover Moore, MP, is Lord Mayor of Sydney.

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