



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Good afternoon your excellencies. My name is Penny Abeywardena and I am the Commissioner for NYC's Mayor's Office for International Affairs.

The role of cities and local government is critical in the ongoing battle against COVID-19.

Whether its food insecurity, health care services, income inequality, those of us living in urban areas are on the frontlines of the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

And I believe local governments are best positioned to inform national policy on how we can all build back better.

Voluntary Local Reviews can be a powerful tool in our collective arsenal.

NYC created the Voluntary Local Review in 2018 so that, as a global city, we could have a pathway for a substantial and direct engagement with the UN.

While it is modeled after the Voluntary National Review, it is important to note that this was not an attempt to usurp member state authority.

Rather, we saw the VLR process as an opportunity for subnational voices to take part in global conversations.

With growing urbanization, cities are more and more banding together to harness their collective voices to advocate for change.

In recognition of the importance of this brand of subnational collaboration, NYC worked to expand and formalize the VLR process.

And so, in September 2019, during the UN General Assembly, the City unveiled the NYC Declaration on the Voluntary Local Review with nearly two dozen signatories committed to achieving the SDGs.

Our goal was to make the VLR process meaningful so that each city engages with it in their own time, with their own resources and their own policy processes.

The Declaration consists of three key commitments:

- Commitment 1: To identify how existing strategies, programs, data, and targets align with the Sustainable Development Goals

- Commitment 2: To provide at least one forum where stakeholders can come together to share experiences, lessons learned, and information gathered using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Commitment 3: To submit a Voluntary Local Review to the United Nations during the United Nations High-Level Political Forum

We emphasize using existing resources to undertake the VLR process to keep the threshold for entry low so that cities of all sizes can participate.

Cities can use the VLR to identify ways to improve their service delivery and become more efficient.

And we believe it can and should inform national policy

I am proud to say that we now have more than 215 signatories, including several cities in Malaysia, Japan and Norway.

I am honored to welcome Basque Country and Geneva as recent signatories.

And happy to see Mayor Jan Vapaavouri as Helsinki was the first to sign on to the Declaration

I would like to thank UN Habitat and UN DESA for creating capacity building opportunities for local governments and providing invaluable guidance throughout this effort.

While the VLR was created in NYC, it belongs to the world. We are proud of the role we have played and will continue to work to strengthen the movement.

We also grateful to the national governments who are open to subnational collaboration on achieving the SDGs.

We call on more member states to embrace the opportunities and insights that the VLR brings.

As the global battle against COVID-19 continues, and communities look to build back better, I believe the VLR can be a powerful tool for introspection, accountability and, most importantly, action.

Thank you.