

Positioning International Geneva as main entry point for cities in view of an effective and inclusive multilateralism

GCH Annual Retreat to assess inputs from partners on relevant topics and plans for 2023

9 December 2022

Villa Rigot, Geneva, Switzerland and online

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RETREAT

The [UN Secretary General's Common Agenda](#) reflects a **strong desire for more effective, inclusive, and networked multilateralism**. It stresses that many more actors, including cities, in addition to the UN bodies and national governments, are required to tackle interconnected global challenges. The Common Agenda underlines that more inclusive multilateralism “*can include parliaments, subnational authorities (cities and local and regional governments), civil society, faith-based organizations, universities, researchers and experts, trade unions, the private sector and industry, and local and grass roots movements, including those led by women and young people.*”

Geneva-based international organizations play a key role in addressing most of the global challenges and offer well-established platforms for intergovernmental discussions and negotiations regarding those issues. **International Geneva, therefore, constitute a natural entry point for cities** – as it is already for civil society and parliaments – to become part of a new effective and inclusive multilateralism. Local and regional governments are interested to contribute to the policy discussions and policy-making processes. The ways of their involvement in the relevant UN procedures are to be further explored.

GCH devotes this year's retreat to elaborate on the involvement of local and regional governments (LRGs) in the new multilateralism. Participants will assess the ongoing work at the GCH, namely in the fields of sustainable development (UNECE - Forum of Mayors), health (WHO), human rights (HRC - UPR) and smart cities (ITU-WSIS) as well as potential new avenues to explore.

The **Forum of Mayors** (FoM) is one of the most eloquent ways of involvement of LRGs into the work of the UN in Geneva. Held in 2020 and 2022 and gathering 40+ Mayors, [the UNECE Forum of Mayors](#) represents an innovative initiative that takes into account the growing role of cities on the global stage and enables them to meaningfully take part in a UN intergovernmental forum focused on issues related to sustainable urban development. Anticipating the decision by Member States (in January 2023) to formalize the FoM as a group of experts and organize it in Geneva in 2023, it is of utmost importance to start the necessary preparations.

The **Universal Periodic Review** conducted under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council is another area where the participation of LRGs would add much value to an existing international process. GCH has started to partner with other organizations to support the participation of LRGs within UPR and raise awareness among States about the importance to do so.

On health, the GCH has identified that the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations at WHO on a **new instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response** as a relevant multilateral entry point for LRGs in Geneva. While the current working draft frequently refers to the importance of the whole of government approach, no LRGs are so far taking part in the process.

The **Mayors' High-level Dialogue at the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#)** is another great example of the fruitful involvement of LRGs in the ongoing global discussion. The WSIS Forum is a true multistakeholder event where the participation of mayors represents an added value in general and regarding issues of digital transformation in cities - in particular.

The retreat is the right format not only for strategic assessment of the different areas of ongoing work at the GCH but also to **fine tune activities for 2023**. GCH has identified entry points for LRGs to contribute to and take part in the activities of relevant international organizations and managed to work with partners to involve mayors, high officials, and experts into diverse policy-oriented processes. Building on these results, it is imperative to overcome the current ad hoc approach and start developing a more institutionalized city-needs-driven framework representing LRGs in International Geneva. Inputs from the participants, including members of the board and GCH close partners, will allow a deep and critical discussion.

In order to conduct a forward looking, critical and fruitful discussion we invite the following stakeholders:

- GCH Board members
- UN entities/organizations
- Member states
- Cities
- City networks
- IOs
- Other experts

Expected outcome of the retreat:

- Assessment of activities in 2022
- Necessary course-correction or finetuning
- List of priority issues for 2023

STRUCTURE AND TOPICS FOR THE RETREAT

09.00-09.30 Welcome remarks – Sami Kanaan or Beatrice Ferrari

09.30-10.00 Pre-session: Constructive criticism

Moderated by Anh Thu Duong

Invited challengers: Alexandre Fasel, Mark Cassayre

- *How do you see GCH after the first post-Covid year?*
- *Can you (others) identify easily what GCH offers and to whom?*
- *What would you expect from us to do differently?*

10.00-10.30 1st session: Good practices of Mayors' activities in Geneva

Presented by Kamelia Kemileva ('5)

Invited challengers: Graham Alabaster, Gitanjali Sah

- Geneva Urban Debates and City-diplomacy
 - Connection with Geneva-based OIs and other relevant actors
- Mayors' High-level Dialogue at WSIS Forum
 - Connection with diverse stakeholders (business, regulators, etc)
- *How to institutionalize the participation of mayors and advance the localization of SDGs? What can GCH bring to the table to assist efficiently?*

10.30-11.15 2nd session: Mayors' possible participation in dedicated global debates

Presented by Anh Thu Duong ('5)

Invited challengers: Jürg Lauber, Adam Day

- Sustainable development: UNECE - Forum of Mayors
- Health: WHO – urban health
- Human rights: HRC & UPR
- Smart cities: ITU WSIS Forum
- High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism
- *Do you agree with these potential areas? Where do you see the biggest impact?*
- *Do GCH activities represent the right approach in the right process at the right time?*
- *Do you see other emerging topics we should focus on?*

11.15-11.45 *Coffee break*

11.45-12.30 2nd session cont'd: Mayors' possible participation in dedicated global debates

12.30 *Lunch break*