

The Barcelona Call for Local Empowerment in the Mediterranean

Barcelona Conference on Urban Development Strategies in the Mediterranean – March 14-15, 2011

Citizens of Arab cities around the Mediterranean are demanding to be engaged and are voicing their determination to build a true democratic transition. The Mayor of Barcelona in opening a major conference on Urban Development responded “We cannot remain silent; we cannot settle for less than action”. Leaders of Arab cities met in Barcelona and articulated their urgent demand and interest in finding new ways to empower the local level so that their development can finally be bottom up.

At the Barcelona Conference which convened on March 14 and 15 at the initiative of the Municipality and the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, Medcities and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), mayors from both rims of the Mediterranean and experts from international and financial organizations (Cities Alliance, French Caisse des Depots, World Bank, United Cities and Local Governments, French Development Agency, GIZ, European Investment Bank, UNDP) agreed that the following is priority:

- Citizens have to be engaged in the formulation of urban policies; the need to strengthen local ownership and ensure greater empowerment of the youth and the civil society at large was strongly voiced.
- Cities should be the vehicle for innovation and knowledge-sharing and lead to new opportunities for local enterprises and new jobs.
- Strategic integrated urban planning is necessary to ensure better service provision, notably in a region with high informal settlements and informal employment.
- Climate change and green growth require from cities prevention, risk management and long term planning.
- Better governance and stronger financial frameworks in cities should promote strong partnership between the public sector and the emerging private sector as well as a national context that enables local development.
- Peer to peer learning among cities is key to provide the necessary support to local government officials.

The 180 participants from all around the Mediterranean called for a bottom up approach. While global experience offers many lessons and great practices, citizens of Arab cities request to choose their own way. At the Barcelona meeting, official representatives, governments, development agencies, city networks and financial institutions coordinated their voice to bring concrete solutions to city strategic planning, as ultimately a tool to facilitate access to citizenship. The ongoing unprecedented socioeconomic and political transformations in the Mediterranean Area, notably in Southern and Eastern countries, provide a unique historical opportunity. While knowledge exists, there needs to be much more sharing of experiences, training of elected and technical officials – many of them new –, and engagement of the private sector as well as the mobilization of civil society. Medcities and CMI act, in cooperation with its partners, as an open platform in order to mobilize the capacity and resources to scale up a response that will promote an innovative and integrative approach.

Barcelona Call to Action

We, the co-organizers of the 2011 Barcelona Conference on Urban Development Strategies in the Mediterranean, relay the following call:

BUILDING ON the conclusions of the Conference and the expression of the needs voiced in Barcelona related to the limited competences and means, it is recognized that urban societies are incubators of economic and social development of the countries of the Mediterranean Region and are instrumental in the transformation processes;

BUILDING ON the extraordinary regional context;

WE COMMIT to join our efforts and voice the following:

To the European Union and the Union for the Mediterranean:

Create a large program to assist the cities in the Mediterranean States to respond to the demands of their citizens.

To Southern and Eastern Mediterranean States:

Initiate and reinforce the decentralization of its institutional systems with the objective to increase the local and municipal power, the competencies and enhance human and financial resources.

Develop national policies to give impulse to Strategic Planning systems for urban sustainable development, based on the leadership of the municipalities, support of government and public-private partnerships.

To Local Authorities:

Develop systems to carve the desired future of the town, to be designed and implemented with strong participation of city stakeholders.

Reinforce national associations of local elected officials and develop the triangular city to city cooperation North-South-South.

Extend networking at local, national and regional levels among cities and with knowledge institutions and financial partners.