

WORLD'S CITIES GEAR UP FOR MAJOR DISASTERS

WITH the world's highest tally of natural disasters occurring during the past year, cities across the globe are gearing up to cope with catastrophes such as tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons, as well as rampant fires and flooding.

"Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives because their towns and villages had not been 'disaster resilient'," says Konrad Otto-Zimmermann, Secretary General of ICLEI, the world's largest association of local governments for sustainability management.

ICLEI has developed a 'Resilient Communities and Cities' programme that will be presented at its triennial congress which takes place in Cape Town from 27 February to 3 March 2006.

Hosted by the City of Cape Town, the five day congress with the theme, 'local solutions for global challenges', is expected to attract over 600 municipal leaders from all over the world.

"Despite enforcement of the Kyoto Protocol, huge polluters like the United States are still not part of this global mechanism for climate protection. Instead of waiting for super powers to act on these global challenges, local authorities are taking local action in the belief that concerted, local actions can have a global impact, both in respect of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in terms of their strong symbolic value and message to national governments" says Otto-Zimmermann.

"The ICLEI association of over 470 metropolitan governments convenes every three years, enabling hundreds of mayors, councillors and municipal managers to review best practices and discuss ways of advancing global sustainable development," says Stephen Granger, convenor of the Local Organising Committee for the ICLEI World Congress 2006.

"The Cape Town programme will reflect the three main areas of Local Agenda 21, namely the building of sustainable communities and cities, the protection of global 'common goods' such as climate and water, and the implementation of environmental governance policies," says Granger.

"Other topics include the reduction of violence, insecurity and conflict; municipal opportunities for global carbon trading, progress made by municipalities in exploiting renewable sources of energy, integrated water resources management, the integration of biodiversity as a municipal resource, sustainable procurement, and a 'spending framework' for environmental resources".

ICLEI celebrates its 15th anniversary at the Cape Town event, which represents the first time the congress is being held in Africa - and in the southern hemisphere. The last one was held in 2003 in Athens.

"Among other topics, the ICLEI World Congress will provide local governments with tools for resilience management and encourage cities to share approaches for disaster risk

management," says Johan Minnie, Manager of Disaster Management, City of Cape Town, and member of the Local Organising Committee for the ICLEI World Congress 2006.

"Besides building resilience to sudden events such as economic shocks, industrial catastrophes, environmental emergencies and natural disasters, cities also need to develop resilience to long-term developments such as climate change. ICLEI's climate protection campaign involves 650 cities which account for up to 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions," says Granger.

Invited keynote speakers include Prof Wangari Maathai of Kenya, Mohammed Valli Moosa of the World Conservation Union, Prof Klaus Topfer of the UN Environment Programme, and Marthinus van Schalkwyk, Minister of Environmental Affairs & Tourism.

Mayors from developed and developing countries will also share their observations on crosscutting issues such as poverty alleviation, the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation targets and gender and capacity building.

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