

I have one of the biggest honours that I think any politician could have, in that I was elected the mayor of the place in which I was born and brought up. So that's Bristol in the UK.

And it's a big job. From education to housing, to budgets to trash collection to protests to counterprotests, cities are complicated organisms. They can be tumultuous, and they can be full of contradiction. And as the mayor, I am the accountable person within Bristol. The buck stops with me. And that sometimes is even for issues over which I have very little real control or power. And that's fine. That's life.

But I have another constituency to whom I'm accountable, and that's one that is within my city, but reaches beyond my city boundaries. And that's the planet and the 7.9 billion other people who depend on it for their survival. We've got ourselves into a situation where it would take 1.7 Earths for our current way of living to be sustainable. So something's got to give. And I think we all know we ain't getting any more Earths, right? So inevitably it's us who need to change. And as we look around and listen in on the international negotiations, as we look at national inaction too often, there'll be many people wondering how we're going to take this challenge on. And even if we're going to be successful. And I understand it, so many people around the world will be losing hope. But my message today is there is hope, and it's hiding in plain sight. And I believe there's huge hope in our cities.

So consider these four numbers. Three, 55, 75, 80.

Cities occupy less than three percent of the Earth's land surface. So we have a small geographical footprint. In fact, if you put all the cities of the world together, you could fit them into India.

And yet cities are home to over half, 55 percent, of the world's population. And we anticipate that will grow to two thirds by the middle of this century.

Cities are responsible for around 75 percent of CO₂ emissions. And we're also prodigious emitters of nitrogen dioxide and methane.

And cities consume 80 percent of the world's energy.

But think about this. That it's the characteristics of cities -- their reach, their size, their density, close proximity of the leadership to the people, their adaptability and their capacity for reinvention -- that mean that we can actually plan to manage those numbers. That means through our cities, we can actually plan to do more, for more people, with less. And it's why I say cities are one of the most effective tools we have at our disposal for leveraging efficiency into our relationships with land, energy and waste.

Through our cities, we can increase the efficiency of more human lives more quickly than through any other form of human organization. So we can, for example, house and employ more people on less land, minimizing the pressure on urban sprawl which competes then for land, for nature, while minimizing the distances people have to travel to meet their basic needs. Through cities, we can have people sharing energy by sharing buildings and through smart innovations like heat networks. The density in our cities makes public transport more accessible and more cost-effective. And through our cities, we can transform our relationship with energy. We need energy security right now. But cities offer markets of such scale that they make investing in renewables more financially attractive. And think about the opportunities with waste. We can leverage efficiency into the collection and processing of waste while introducing the principles of the circular economy at scale so that resources are recycled, goods are reused and unavoidable waste is processed for energy, for example, food waste for fertilizer. Now just think about the global potential of a worldwide network of cities scaling up these kinds of efficiencies for over half and coming on two thirds of the world's population.

And here is the hope I mentioned at the beginning. You don't have to just imagine that. From Freetown to Los Angeles, from Kampala to London, and in many, many cities in between, mayors, city leaders are stepping up and taking action to meet the challenge of the moment. So take Malmö, a city of just under 350,000 people. They've developed a heat network that is fed by heat generated by processed waste. They intend to be 100 percent powered by renewable or recycled heat by 2030. Oslo is a city that's subsidizing electric vehicles and charging points. They have introduced a circular waste management system. They've purchased a biogas plant, and nearly 50 percent of all their food waste is recycled.

Singapore is one of the densest cities in the world, but they are a model of green planning. In recent years, they've introduced huge freshwater reserves and urban gardens that act as the lungs of the city. And I have a huge amount of admiration for Bogota as well, one of the densest cities in Latin America. They've introduced the bus rapid transit system. They're making walking and cycling more accessible, and today, have one of the largest fleets of electric buses in Latin America.

And while I have the stage, let me show off a little bit about my own city, Bristol, home to 465,901 people, one of whom is here today. We have a fantastic reputation for being one of the greenest cities in Europe. In Bristol, we have a housing crisis. We must build homes. But we're very conscious of the fact that the kind of homes we build and where we build them will be one of the biggest determinants of the price the planet pays for our growth. So we're focused on delivering net-zero homes at higher density on old industrial land in the middle of the city. This allows us to relieve the pressure for urban sprawl. It allows us to design in active travel and design out car dependency. We're even taking action on the climate consequences of the humble toilet. Across our public housing stock, we are replacing bathrooms and we're taking the opportunity to replace the fittings with more water-efficient alternatives, more water-efficient showers, sinks and taps, and more water-efficient toilets. So not all climate change action is full of glamour, is it?

But we mayors are not just focused on what happens inside our city boundaries. You'll find mayors all over the world are leading beyond their authority. They're coming together in international networks to set hard target for decarbonization to which they hold themselves mutually accountable. You'll find hundreds of these city solidarity networks live in the world right now. The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy is a network of around 12,000 cities. They've made a collective commitment to take action to ensure that 2030 emissions are nearly two gigatons lower than they would otherwise be if we carried on as we are. And as mayors, we're also stepping up to influence international organizations and the global policy that can support us to take action. The C40 is a network of nearly 100 mayors representing the world's biggest global cities. City diplomacy is central to their work. Members attend national and international negotiations with the aim of influencing decision making and global commitments.

And let me just say, what you get with mayors is a commitment to ensure that these global commitments are turned from words into actions. Our proximity to our residents means that we are immediately accountable for delivering change that people can see and experience.

But herein we bump into another challenge. We will not get the worldwide network of efficient cities that we need without major investment. We will not get a worldwide network of decarbonized cities just because we need it, we want it or because we make flowery declarations about it. We will only get them when we plan it and then pay for it. In the end, city leaders around the world struggle to get access to the kind of finance they need to unlock their city's full potential. And yet, here, too, we're not waiting around. In the UK, I'm part of something called the UK Cities Climate Investment Commission. It's our aim to put the UK's biggest cities in touch with the finance they need for that potential to be released. We've identified 206 billion pounds worth of decarbonization opportunities across the UK, retrofitting, renewables, transition of fleet to electric. And we are making sure that public and private investors are aware of these opportunities across the UK.

So here's the thing. Mayors, city leaders, we haven't got time for abstract debates or merely flowery declarations. Our populations want change today. They want change yesterday. The climate crisis we're in demands leadership. And mayors I meet around the world are stepping up into that space to meet the moment. We want and need national governments and international organizations to work with us, to back us, to support us. But we cannot wait for them. The world's top scientists tell us we've got ten years to turn this thing around. And because of a history of inaction, underperformance, turgidness in decision making, that means that right now we need to make some big bets and we need to make some big bets on interventions that will deliver change at scale and pace. And I think our cities give us good odds.

So here's my call to action. We need to work with the world's mayors to develop a global plan for cities. It's a plan that must decarbonize and build efficiency into existing cities, but to make sure that the future processes of urbanization maximize city efficiency. And when I say global, I do mean global. It's a plan that must transcend national boundaries. It must be in the Global North, and it must be in the Global South, where 90 percent of future urbanization is going to take

place. And it's a plan that must have us move beyond our narrow self-national interest. We must come to see the world's cities as international assets rather than national possessions. We must come to see that investing in the increased efficiency of the world's cities is key to our future. It's going to be key to unlocking our potential. And it's an investment in our global common good.

When I was elected mayor of Bristol in 2016, I had a limited appreciation of the global role of the city. And by extension, I had a limited appreciation of the level of responsibility that was therefore falling on my shoulders as a newly-elected mayor of a major UK city. In the years since, I've come to understand that cities, the way they are planned, the way they function, the way they grow and the way they innovate will be key to whether we are or are not successful in taking on this challenge to stem the tide of global climate change. If we can unlock the full potential of our cities, we can minimize the price the planet pays for hosting us in our growing numbers. I think efficient cities could be one of the most effective tools we have. So I ask you to work with us to build them.