COP31 failed. Now it's time for the cities, and the people, to lead.

Antalya ended in collapse. No deal, the longest COP ever, and the first failure since Copenhagen. National governments couldn't even agree to mention fossil fuels.

But look at the cities. More than half of the 14,000 cities in the Global Covenant of Mayors already have climate targets stricter than their own governments'. Even C40 calls the first recognition of cities in the COP text "proof that our advocacy is delivering."

And credit where it's due: ICLEI and the LGMA constituency got real results in Antalya, even though the COP failed. The COP31 Presidency created a Special Envoy for Local and Regional Governments and held a high-level dialogue on urban resilience with world leaders. Mayor Piia Elo of Turku spoke for all local governments: the Paris Agreement will only be delivered through all levels of government.

ICLEI President Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh, Mayor of Malmö, is clear about what comes next: "ICLEI will keep building bridges between national, regional and local governments."

So here's my message to every mayor: stop asking for permission. Start setting the pace.

Push your government and parliament. Show them the road forward and make them follow.

Communicate in a new way. At COP31 I spoke with Ingmar Rentzhog of We Don't Have Time. His point is simple: most people support climate action, but they do it silently, while the few who profit from business as usual are louder. That's why he's working to get 100 million people onto the streets on Democracy Day 2028: North and South, young and old, left and right.

Those 100 million people live in our cities. Their streets and squares are where the movement will be seen. Mayors should be the first to join.

Find new partners. Cities need businesses, investors and innovators to show what cities can do:

→ Viable Cities, with climate city contracts linking Swedish cities and national government

→ Kommuninvest, financing municipalities' green investments

→ EIT Climate-KIC, driving system change across Europe

→ SOCAP in the US, linking impact capital with real-world change

...and many more.

Next stop: COP32 in Addis Ababa. By then cities shouldn't be asking for a seat at the table. Together with their citizens, they should be showing the way.

As Ingmar says: "We will win, but we need to unite."

Watch our conversation

📎 unitedforthefuture2028.org

@Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh @Piia Elo @Sadiq Khan @Ingmar Rentzhog @ICLEI @C40 Cities @We Don't Have Time @Viable Cities

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