



How Cities Can Lead the Way on Equity and Environmental Justice

#MayorsCare Summit on

Modern Slavery and Climate Change: The Commitment of the Cities

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Ed Murray – Mayor of Seattle

Good afternoon, it is an honour to be here. My thanks to Pope Francis and to my fellow Mayors and to Governor Brown for the opportunity to share ideas with you today.

The words of Pope Francis are leading us to a new understanding of climate change and particularly how it impacts the poor. I hope that this conversation will awaken the world to this reality. Too often we address climate change in terms of its economic impact and towards environmental impacts. The Pope has made a point that we also must address it in terms of the moral imperative. As the Mayors of the world's most dynamic cities, we have an incredible opportunity to change the conversation and carry the Pope's message forward.

The city of Seattle was named after a Native American chief. We are in the northwest corner of the United States. We are surrounded by incredible water, and mountains, and forests. But climate change is already threatening our quality of life. Drought and shorter winters have reduced the mountain snowpack and it is affecting our hydroelectric power, our fish and our food products. Seattle is committed to a bold goal of achieving zero carbon emissions by the year 2050. When measured by population, we have already reduced greenhouse emissions from vehicles, buildings and waste by 20% since 1990. That is despite a 23% growth in population and a 14% increase in jobs.

As the Pope cautioned, the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together. In Seattle we are humbled and inspired by his words. Our city is committed to equity and has a history of social justice. We led the nation last year in raising the minimum wage and we are attempting to address issues such as affordable housing and access to jobs and our technology centre. But low-income communities in Seattle, which often means, as in most United States, communities of colour, immigrants and refugees, are often left out of the environmental benefits of our cities. The disparities are not just about one city, and Mayor Landrieu earlier today talked about the reality of New Orleans. But really the situation that happened there could happen in any city. We can fit our homes with solar panels and we can build longer-lasting batteries for our cars, but those solutions are costly and they do not have a direct, immediate impact on the very poor amongst us. By bringing us together today, the Holy Father has provided a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Seattle is addressing that through series of initiatives focusing on the poor. On Earth Day I launched a new initiative called "Equity in the Environment". Through this initiative we are looking at all of the policies of our city and determining how we can change those policies to benefit those who are least served amongst us, when it comes to the environment, not to simply dealing with issues of poverty, but dealing with issues of poverty as it deals with the environment. We are meeting with those communities, with their organizations and developing an approach across numerous areas to deal with the environment in those parts of our city that are not benefiting from the environment. Many of our lowest income neighbourhoods are the most polluted. They are located near industries, they suffer higher rates of health problems, respiratory disease and cancer. They are also located in areas that are most likely to flood, so we are addressing infrastructure as well, by identifying and installing new infrastructure that deals with issues such as drainage in those areas that are usually not served. These same neighbourhoods often do not have access to healthy food, and we are focusing again on bringing fresh market food into our very low-income neighbourhoods and developing markets in those neighbourhoods for food.

Next we will focus on the issue of affordable housing. Seattle is one of America's fastest growing cities. Our economy is booming, you know, and you have heard of our industries: Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks and Amazon. But that great economic boom has made our city not affordable. Often, those who work in service jobs and hotels or restaurants take the bus or drive to the suburbs at night to go home because they can't afford live in the city they work in.

The centrepiece of our plan to deal with affordable housing has required that all new development in every neighbourhood is built for those who make the least, particularly those who are making less than medium wage. By building affordable housing in our existing neighbourhoods, where we have transit, and parks, and schools, we will make a significant impact on the environment, as people take the bus or light rail instead of having to take the car hours everyday from the suburbs into the city. *The Atlantic* magazine wrote last week

that our plan could actually be the first to get growth right in a way that is fair, and as I said, they have not seen that in an American city anywhere.

Another challenge that we face is that the great economy that we have is not necessarily benefiting those who actually live in the city. Many of our residents are not actually getting those jobs. So we are addressing this by looking at the area of technology and the environment and the issue of poverty and bringing them together. Through a new program called "Community Power Works" we are actually training people to be part of the green economy to retrofit houses and buildings so that those buildings are more efficient and those individuals get living wage jobs. And we have actually demonstrated that by being green, by caring about the environment, we can actually not hurt the economy but create a new economy with folks who did not have jobs before (I am trying to go fast here, because I know the Holy Father is on his way).

So, in concluding, I do want to say two things. First of all, on the issue of human trafficking, like many of you, Seattle is trying to develop a new and innovative approach to this. But when it comes to human trafficking and sexual exploitation, one of the things we are trying to come to grips with is who are the most vulnerable and why they are the most vulnerable. We know that women are. We know that children are. But we also know that there is a group within that group that is even more vulnerable: gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gender people and children. We must address the roots of all of the reasons that people are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking, if we are to get at the root causes and finally deal with it.

Seattle University, which is a Jesuit University in our city, has a great leader in Father Sundborg. He wrote an editorial piece recently in our newspaper. Father Sundborg said on the Pope's letter on the environment that "consistent focus is not on ourselves but on others, on the poor and the most vulnerable". He wrote "it is a joint call to solidarity with those who are most in need of our efforts because they are the ones who most experience the destructive effects of climate change. We are the ones who can most do what is needed to mitigate the effects causing their suffering. We are called to look beyond ourselves to others to ensure and protect the human dignity of the most vulnerable out of our own humanity". The city of Seattle looks forward to working with cities around the world as we move towards Paris. Thank you very much.