

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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Towards a “Geneva Cities Forum”

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Summary

This document results from a series of informal consultations in Geneva and Nairobi in preparation of the conference “Reviewing the State of Safety in Cities” (Geneva 26-28 June 2017). These consultations brought to light an interest among various Geneva-based organizations to develop a partnership on city-level expertise, networks and activities. This document summarizes the key strategic elements noted during these consultations under the overall umbrella of a “Geneva Cities Forum” – a name that has been suggested for this partnership. In summary, the consultations propose the following elements for a “Geneva Cities Forum”:

- To focus on small and medium cities – the type of city that is most at risk of being left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.
- To bring together the expertise, know-how and networks of Geneva-based actors with the aim of helping small and medium cities address their humanitarian, peace, and security challenges.
- To leverage existing network relationships and solutions to crime, violence and exclusion in small and medium cities, including through the Global Partnership Initiative on Safer Cities, and United Cities and Local Government (UCLG).
- To facilitate stronger partnerships between small and medium cities and national governments, international organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders to ensure commitment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

The Geneva Cities Forum builds on Geneva’s comparative advantage as a global hub. The value added of Geneva lies in the know-how and expertise embedded in Geneva’s community of professionals in the fields of humanitarian action, health, human rights, development, disaster risk, peace mediation, and security; and the facilitation of access to such know-how and expertise for small and medium cities.

The Geneva Cities Forum is not intended to be an independent organization but a joint partnership of interested actors, ideally supported with a dedicated human resource capacity and partnership arrangements among interested parties to take the Geneva Cities Forum forward. It also aims to facilitate exchange and relationships between major UN and other policy hubs on issues relevant to small and medium cities.

Strategic elements

Network approach: In Geneva, work on ‘cities’ is not dominated by any single institution or actor. In other words, the ‘city issues’ are not institutionalized. It is therefore appropriate to advance city level issues and activities in Geneva through a networking approach, in which various actors combine their respective strengths on city level issues and open a networking and knowledge hub. Such a network approach is also important to incubate new initiatives and partnerships to help craft solutions to the rapidly increasing risk of conflict and insecurity in urban settings.

Small and medium cities: The Geneva Cities Forum focuses on the network building and exchange with small and medium cities. The World Cities Report 2016 states:

The fastest growing urban centres are the small and medium cities with less than one million inhabitants, which account for 59 per cent of the world’s urban population and 62 per cent of the urban population in Africa. Despite the demographic importance and potential role of such cities, urban planning efforts in developing countries have focused disproportionately on the problems of large metropolitan areas, thereby contributing to urban primacy. If small and medium cities are to fulfil their potential, then they should form part of the new urban agenda for developing countries. (p.8)

Technical and expert level: Discussions in the Geneva Cities Forum will take place at the senior technical and expert level; i.e. the professional level just under the mayor, leaders of community organizations, or thought leaders from academia, think tanks, governments or international organizations. The target group is a group of professionals that can deliver the ambitions expressed in the new Urban Agenda and SDGs at the local level.

Complementarity: With its focus on Geneva’s institutional ecosystem, on small and medium cities, and on the technical or expert level, the Geneva Cities Forum seeks to complement existing forums by infusing solution-oriented knowledge and practice relevant for political discussion on the SDGs and the NUA, Mayors Forums, UCLG or other city level networks. The Geneva Cities forum will make it easier for other networks to benefit from the expertise and know-how available in Geneva.

Strengthening connections between UN and other policy hubs: The Geneva Cities Forum does not act as a political forum (hence, the focus on the senior expert level) or replace any political processes associated to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals or the New Urban Agenda. Through a networked approach and by focusing on the technical level

and on small medium cities, the Geneva Cities Forum seeks to stimulate exchange on cities issues between different UN and other policy hubs.

Docking station: The Geneva Cities Forum also responds to the comments received from city officials that they have a preference to interact with more formalised entities. Given the number of city level networks on a whole variety of issues, city officials are weary of smallish initiatives with little institutional back-bone. Hence the focus on a networking approach backed-up by existing institutions.

Towards a Geneva Cities Forum

- **Founding partnership:** The conference “Reviewing the State of Safety in Cities” in Geneva 26-28 June 2017, will strengthen stakeholder’s engagement to advance the “Geneva Cities Forum” later in 2017.
- **Link to bilateral or multilateral initiatives:** The Geneva Cities Forum will seek to generate synergies with existing bilateral and multilateral development organizations as well as other networks in the city space.
- **Existing network base:** The Geneva Cities Forum will build on several existing network achievements of Geneva-based actors that will be combined for stronger partnership.
- **Biennial conference and inter-sessional process:** Connected to a biennial conference series that brings the network together, interested actors can propose ‘inter-sessional processes’ focusing on specific issues, the results of which will be presented at a biennial meeting of the Geneva Cities Forum.