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***Speech at the Guangzhou International Award for
Urban Innovation***

OPENING CEREMONY

7 December, 9:30-10:30, Guangzhou

Distinguished mayors and councilors,

Colleagues and partners,

It is an honor to be with you today to celebrate the third edition of the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation.

My thanks go to our co-organizers, the Municipal Government of Guangzhou and Metropolis. Our longstanding friendship with Guangzhou plays a vital role in the agenda of our organization and contributes to enhancing our global network's links with our Metropolitan and Asia Pacific Sections.

Special thank you goes to UCLG Co-President and Mayor of Guangzhou, Wen Guohui, for hosting us and for being

willing to undertake the challenge of leading the destiny of UCLG together with me and the rest of the UCLG Presidency for the next mandate. It is a great pleasure to be in China as one of my first trips as UCLG President. Strengthening our Asia Pacific Section and the exchange of experiences among us is one of the main priorities of my mandate.

Thank you, also, to all of the cities that have made the effort to submit initiatives to the Award. This event would not be possible without your commitment to sharing your experiences globally.

Over the past six years, the Guangzhou Award has truly become a highlight of the UCLG calendar. One of UCLG's founding principles is that we all become stronger when we share and learn from one another. The Guangzhou Award continues in this proud tradition. It demonstrates that **local**

governments are at the forefront of tackling the major global challenges of our age.

And, in 2016, **our role as innovators is more important than ever before.** The SDGs, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Climate Agreement require brave new solutions from all of us.

We local and regional leaders know that development, sustainability, and urbanization are inseparable. That's why we've been advocating, through UCLG and the Global Taskforce, for **links to be made** between these new agendas at global level, and for **synergies to be harnessed** between them on the ground.

We have also called for **increased recognition** of the role that local and regional governments can play in the achievement of global goals. After all, we have responsibilities related to all 17 SDGs, from poverty

eradication, to service provision to fostering peace and equality. The New Urban Agenda, adopted in October at Habitat III in Quito, is also directly related to the daily work of city leaders and our administrations.

All these global agendas must be localized.

Johannesburg is not the same as Guangzhou. Big cities face different challenges to small towns and rural areas.

The Global North has different responsibilities to the Global South. Goals set at international level must be adapted to the unique challenges and opportunities of each territory, culture and community. Localization is essential to successful implementation.

In this context, the Guangzhou Award has a vital role to play. While our goals are global, **innovation is a distinctively local phenomenon**. New ideas can only be generated from the bottom up, in the cauldron of

experimentation in diverse contexts. Innovation from the top down is high cost, high risk, and insensitive to local realities. It is no coincidence that cities have led the way with responses to climate change, urbanization, social inclusion, and renewed governance and democratic participation.

And **urban innovation can act as a catalyst for sustainability at global level**. Experimentation in cities across the world provides a global innovation laboratory. We try things out, we make mistakes, we learn, we improve. Sometimes we hit upon a powerful new idea that can be shared, replicated and inspire others.

The Guangzhou Award and the community of practice that has grown around it play a vital role in this process. They provide **a showcase for policies** that drive social, economic and environmental sustainability. They prove that we must not be afraid to take risks. Because in a culture of innovation there is no such thing as failure. Every

experiment is an opportunity to learn and do better next time.

It is with this in mind that I would like to congratulate all 15 finalists of the 2016 Guangzhou Award and thank you for your leadership. Your solutions represent an exciting mix of technological experimentation, social innovation, and cultural creativity that should serve as inspiration to local administrations around the world. You are proving that we can use creativity and imagination to solve the most important development challenges.

In closing, I would like to urge all of us, in cities large and small, to continue to innovate, break new ground and clear the path for others to follow in our footsteps. Let's work to create a culture of innovation in our administrations and in our local communities, particularly among young women. Women and girls have great untapped potential to contribute to science, technology, the economy, democratic

governance and culture. Their ideas hold the key to our sustainable future.

Together let's use the opportunity provided by UCLG, its sections and committees, and, of course, the Guangzhou Award, to take our collaboration to the next stage.

Thank you