

January 2024 Speaker - David Miller

‘While Nations Talk, Cities Act’- Cities Tackling Climate Crisis

David, mayor of Toronto 2003-2010 and longtime environment protection activist, is now managing director of the C40 Centre for City Climate Policy and Economy. C40 is a coalition of 96 megacities around the world united to tackle the climate crisis; “C40” because when formed in 2005-6 there were 40 cities participating. UWCNY invited other CFUW clubs to also listen to his Zoom talk.

David began: “The climate crisis is a collective problem caused collectively and there must be a collective response. Cities are boldly moving ahead; national governments have done far less than promised. It’s the nature of city governments to solve problems, to work with and listen to the community, to act; national governments tend to form a policy committee. It’s essential to move rapidly because 2030, the year set in the 2015 Paris Climate Accord to limit global heating to 1.5° C and cut greenhouse emissions in half, is just six years from now.”

He continued: “There’s a chasm between science and action.” As examples of the crisis, he cited wildfires in Canada, floods in Pakistan, and heat waves in China. “The situation is serious all over the world; it’s bad for nature and extraordinarily concerning for humans. Cities should be in the lead because 55 percent of the world’s population lives in cities; by 2050 it will be 70 percent.” 2050 is when emissions are supposed to have declined to net zero under the Paris accord.

“Cities occupy 2 percent of the world’s land space but create 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions and consume 75 percent of the world’s energy. Cities have the technical capacity and resources to act. Their large populations mean their mayors are listened to nationally and internationally.” He gave examples of action already by megacities. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – 100 percent renewable energy mandatory in municipal buildings; Shenzhen, China – fully electrified bus fleet, 16,000 buses; Jakarta, Indonesia – 92 percent of the population has easy access to public transportation; Milan, Italy – plant-based meals in schools.

There are several ways cities can act he said: (1) Buildings. Require large older buildings to energy retrofit heating and cooling. “It pays off – big job creation, dollar savings, people want to move in because their energy bills will be lower.” Vancouver is a world leader in having a building code that says new buildings must meet net zero emission standards and not use gas. Cities should provide low-cost financing loans for building retrofits with the money repaid from property taxes. (2) Waste management – convert wet waste into compost to forestall methane emission. (3) A city “climate budget” saying how much each municipal department can spend. Toronto and Montreal are looking into this. (4) Densify to prevent urban sprawl. (5) Become a “public transit city” connecting the population. The more this is done the less people will drive which will reduce emissions.

Toronto had made progress but is “currently stalled” because of its budget shortfall, he said. He criticized the Alberta government’s August 2023 moratorium on approvals for all wind, solar, and geothermal projects and premier Danielle Smith’s preference for “natural gas-fuelled power generation.” David said, “‘Natural gas’ isn’t natural, its methane, as polluting as coal.”

David’s book *Solved: How the World’s Great Cities Are Fixing the Climate Crisis* first published in 2020 will be out in paperback this spring.

Susan Goldenberg