

## **Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The launch of the United Nations Global Dialogue on AI Governance represents an important milestone in building inclusive, effective and future-oriented governance frameworks for artificial intelligence.

The report provides a valuable assessment of the opportunities and challenges presented by AI and rightly emphasizes the complexity of governing this rapidly evolving technology. However, the Global Cities Hub believes that it overlooks one level of government that is indispensable for translating principles into practice: local and regional governments (LRGs).

As we discuss the future of AI governance, it is essential to recognize that cities and regions are not merely stakeholders. They are public authorities with significant responsibilities across many of the sectors where AI is already transforming society.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping decision-making in healthcare, education, mobility, environmental management, public administration, and labor markets. These are policy domains where local and regional governments often hold direct responsibilities and where AI's impacts are experienced first and most visibly by citizens.

LRGs themselves are increasingly deploying AI-enabled solutions to improve urban planning, optimize transport systems, strengthen environmental management, modernize public services and enhance citizen engagement. At the same time, they are responsible for ensuring that these technologies respect fundamental rights, promote transparency and accountability, and maintain public trust.

We are confident that their practical experience offers an essential perspective on how global principles and national strategies are implemented on the ground. One area where this role is particularly important is data governance. Cities generate vast amounts of data – the

essential raw material that powers AI systems. This data must be collected responsibly, governed transparently and used ethically for the public good.

Smart regulatory frameworks for data governance, including data privacy and data protection, are therefore essential to support trustworthy AI implementation at both the national and local levels. The United Nations could play an important role in promoting common approaches and international cooperation in this area.

The environmental dimension of AI also deserves greater attention. The rapid expansion of AI is driving unprecedented growth in data centers which consume significant amounts of electricity and water and generate heat that can worsen urban heat island effects during periods of extreme temperatures. These challenges need to be managed locally. Cities are therefore central to balancing digital transformation with environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

The report devotes significant attention to human rights, democracy, information integrity, cultural rights and child safety – and rightly so. Yet many of the safeguards protecting these rights are implemented at the local level through education systems, social services, public procurement, housing, and local policing. LRGs are frontline duty-bearers for many of the rights that AI can either strengthen or undermine.

The Panel has convincingly identified what must be governed. The GCH suggests that future work should also identify who governs AI in practice. LRGs' operational knowledge can significantly improve the evidence base for policymaking by showing how AI affects communities, public services and urban systems in practice. In this sense, they represent what might be called the missing governance layer.

Fortunately, strong foundations already exist. Initiatives such as the Mayors for Digital Cooperation (MDC) and United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) demonstrate the growing commitment of local authorities to responsible digital transformation. These networks can help bridge local

experience with global policymaking and strengthen implementation of international AI governance principles.

Allow me to conclude with three recommendations by the GCH:

- First, AI should not be deployed solely to maximize efficiency or technological performance. It should improve quality of life, strengthen social cohesion, promote cultural participation and enhance human well-being.
- Second, AI governance should be designed for resilience, not only optimization. Especially in urban environments, governance frameworks should strengthen the capacity of public institutions to respond to climate change, health emergencies, cyberattacks and other complex future challenges while ensuring continuity of essential public services.
- Third, local and regional governments should be recognized as a distinct governance actor alongside national governments, industry, academia and civil society. They should be systematically included in thematic consultations, policy discussions and evidence gathering on AI deployment and implementation.

For AI governance to be truly inclusive, effective and people-centered, the voices of cities and regions must be part of global conversation. Their participation will strengthen the legitimacy, relevance and practical impact of this Global Dialogue and help ensure that AI delivers sustainable and equitable benefits for communities everywhere.

Thank you.