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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS OPENING ADDRESS AT WORLD CITIES
SUMMIT INNOVATIVE CITIES OF OPPORTUNITY FORUM**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Greg. Thank you for all you do for cities around the world as a great leader and expert on addressing climate change. We all rely on you and we thank you for your good work. It is such an honor for New York City to host the sixth World Cities Summit. It means a lot to the people of this city. Now as you know, New Yorkers are legendarily tough-minded, maybe even a little jaded to some. But we still get excited when visitors come from around the world, especially leaders of this caliber, to join us. And it's something we think enriches us to have you present with us.

The leaders around this table are the people who are dealing with some of the most challenging questions in the world. And I want to thank you for that. I want to thank my fellow mayors for being at the front line. We know, as mayors, we don't have the luxury to just think about and debate issues. Every day, the issues visit us upon our doorstep. Every day, the issues are present in the lives of our people and are urgent to us. And that is why it is a special honor for me to be your colleague because that urgency – that urgency represents the highest form of public service in my view. We, by definition, are the actors and the doers, and we innovate, and we create because we know we must. It's not an option not to serve our people.

There are immensely complex issues facing the world today. I think it's fair to say, with each passing generation, the complexity of the challenges grows. And in that environment, sadly, we have seen too many times where national governments look away from problems rather than taking them on directly. Sometimes it's more politically convenient to ignore a problem or minimize it then to accept the challenge. But again, in that environment, mayors become even more important. We become the bright shining lights – the actual leaders willing to accept challenges, to talk about them bluntly and honestly with our people, to show people, even amidst the complexities, that there are real and tangible solutions.

I think whenever the topic turns to climate change, certainly in the discourse here in the United States, there's an odd mix of still coming to full recognition of the extent of the challenge and then trying to apply some kind of optimistic and purposeful world view to how we address it. And still as you know, in this country, there are too many people who deny the full extent of the challenge of climate change. That's a debate we're still having. But Americans pride themselves on the certain can-do nature and a belief we can achieve things. We don't see enough of the action we would like to see on the national level if we are to live up to that self-impression. However, at the local level, we see extraordinary and encouraging things and I think that could be said for so many of you around this table.

At the local level, despite the complexity, we see real solutions starting to emerge. Here is a challenge, in some ways, tougher than any one that the world has faced before – something that we could consider beyond our grasp. But at the local level, there is urgency. There is a belief in our own capacity to slowly but surely turn the situation. And that's exciting and our people appreciate it. I have to tell you, I've learned long ago, the people often lead us. The people often recognize the problem and are willing to do the tough things it takes to make a change. The people know – I know this from the experience of just the last few years in my own city. When we

were visited by Hurricane Sandy, people in so many of our cities understand climate change now through their own personal experience. It's not an abstraction and they recognize what it means to them and their family, and they're willing to make sacrifices and do things differently.

We, as mayors, channel that energy. We create. We innovate. We show what actions can happen on a broader scale in our cities. And we are the template for our national governments that so [inaudible].

It is exciting to be here with all of you. I just want to take a quick moment to acknowledge two very special guests in the room – of course, the chairman of the World Cities Summit, Desmond Lee. Thank you again for your leadership. It means so much to us. And I want to thank Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations Jan Eliasson for joining us and elevating these proceedings as well. And from my own administration, I think you've heard from some of them and will meet them. They are extraordinary public servants, so devoted every day to innovating in the best New York City tradition. I want to thank our deputy mayor for housing and economic development, Alicia Glenn; our parks and recreation commissioner, Mitchell Silver; our international affairs commissioner, Penny Abeywardena, our executive director of the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, Darren Bloch; and our – my senior advisor for recovery, resiliency, and infrastructure, Bill Goldstein. Each of them looks forward to learning from you and I hope I can humbly, each of them may have some ideas and some examples to offer that could be helpful in your cities as well.

This summit excites us all because we know we'll come away from it with ideas and inspiration. We know we'll be better after these days because we're not just going to hear things that are theoretical. We're going to hear things that are working right now and can be brought immediately to our cities. And let's face it, being a mayor or being a government official of any kind – sometimes it can be a little lonely, sometimes it can be a little challenging and frustrating. But when we meet together and we hear what each has created, we get energy. We get inspiration. And I know people will come out of these sessions ready to dive into the toughest problems with renewed commitment.

Here in this city, we made some very important decisions in the last few months. We decided that we needed to chart a new course. And we were blessed to build upon a good framework. My predecessor, Michael Bloomberg, had created a very powerful planning process for this city – then called PlaNYC, that focused on resiliency, focused on economic growth, focused on sustainability. And it was a good and powerful document. And in my administration, we decided to build on that notion by recognizing that environmental sustainability and economic sustainability for our people have to walk hand in hand, and that a growing economic inequality amongst the people of the city – and obviously mirrored all over our nation – will not make for strength, will not make for a fully satisfying and absolutely strong city in the future. We can't have one piece of the spectrum failing while the other pieces work and consider ourselves a success. I gave the example of the time in April when we [inaudible] to epitomize the notion of all members of this community moving forward together. I laid out the notion that – would any one of us be satisfied if we had a [inaudible] environmental system – environmentally sustainable city – a picture of a green city – and yet many of our residents failing and struggling economically. We wouldn't be satisfied. Nor would we be satisfied if we had a city of great prosperity and shared prosperity with an environmental dynamic that was causing a worse and worse environment, and worse health dynamics, and worse climate change impacts as a result of our mistakes. We wouldn't be satisfied. We would never say in the cool light of day that it's okay to lean to one side or another. We need to bring these strands together. And they combine so powerfully because so much of what we need to do for our environment also creates jobs and economic opportunity. We need to see them as inherently kindred. And we have said in this city – if so many of our citizens live in poverty, we're not going to meet the standard that we believe in. So we've made a pledge over the next [inaudible] New Yorkers out of poverty.

Now, a lot of people in this room know about the great cities of the United States of America. I used that example of 800,000 people – it's about the size of one of our booming cities in North Carolina. Well, we intend to take as many people out of poverty in New York City in the decade as live in total in Charlotte, North Carolina. And by setting that goal publicly and holding ourselves accountable, we believe we'll move things on

a grand scale. We're doing the kinds of things necessary for an economically sustainable city, like our plan to build and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. Again, to give you a population comparison, that's about as many people as live within the city limits of Miami, Florida.

All of us have to do things on a bolder scale than ever before because we are more central than ever before, because the demands are greater than ever before. You know, we look at the impact of technology – its many blessings and its many challenges – but we also recognize that access to technology is now a new measure of fairness and equality. Broadband access now is a topic of great interest all over this country, and we recognize that any American family, any family here in New York City that does not have access to high-speed, quality internet service cannot fully participate in the economy or in the educational process. So we're working every day to ensure an equality of access to ensure that everyone is a part of this society. And we believe that when it comes to education – we believe that all our children need a strong and early start on their educational futures because today, education determines economic destiny more than at any point in previous human history. And so in this city, starting in September, every child at pre-kindergarten age – at four years old – will be guaranteed a full-day pre-kindergarten education for free, so we can help this whole society to be stronger.

So, all of that is consistent with an environmental focus. All of that fits the notion of holistic sustainability. And we need to push ourselves – all of us need to push each other, and help each other, and uplift each other. And I've talked about the bold goals we have for lifting people out of poverty. We have bold goals as well when it comes to our environment. We are honored to be one of the largest cities in the world committed to an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emission by 2050. We are honored to have committed to zero waste to our landfills – zero – by 2030. We're honored to have taken a pledge that we will have the finest air quality of any major American city by 2030. We have to hold these standards up to create action. And some would say, why lift the bar so high? Isn't that threatening? Isn't that challenging? Doesn't that leave the possibility that there could be unforeseen circumstances, or the possibility of failure? Well I think it's the opposite. I think those high and noble goals energize action. I think they reduce the bureaucratic roadblocks. I think they inspire new ideas. I think they create unity. I think they create public faith because the public is looking to each of us – again, in many ways, and more so than national leaders – to be the decisive agents of change.

I'll finish with this. We should be proud of our work. We should recognize its impact. We should recognize that any one of us around this table might do something that will change people's lives for the better, and then be taken as an example by so many others – that at any given point, one of us may innovate an approach that catches on in other cities – not just in our nation, but around the world – that we are those innovators. And that is a great responsibility, but also a great opportunity. Because it's not just that cities are natural centers of creativity and innovation, are naturally modern and forward-thinking, it's also that the numbers have changed. In the year 1800, just three percent of the Earth's population lived in cities. According to UN estimates today, more than half of all the residents of this globe live in urban areas, and we know that number is rising steadily. The reality of governance is changing because the pertinence of cities is greater with every passing year, and we are in fact the spark of change. We are the center, the focal point, more than ever before in history. And as I said, this work is hard, and I thank all of you for having devoted your lives to it. But whenever you might feel for a moment frustrated or bogged down – whenever you might feel that you have the right idea, but it's not breaking through – my simple message today is to persevere because there is a wonderful quote that summarizes powerfully how each of us and the teams we've assembled around us can make a transcendent difference, not only in our city, but far beyond our boundaries. A great quote from the anthropologist, Margaret Mead – she said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Thank you, my friends. I look forward to a great experience with you these days in our city. Thank you.

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