



**TESTIMONY OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE
BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
OF THE PHILIPPINES**

Friday, September 28, 2018

I. INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. My name is Daniel Zarrilli, and I am New York City Mayor de Blasio's Chief Climate Policy Advisor and the Director of OneNYC. I'd like to thank Commissioner Cadiz and the members of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and the New York City Bar Association for this opportunity to speak about our approach to climate liability and the progress the de Blasio Administration has made as a global leader in the fight against climate change, including the actions we've taken to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for the destruction that has been unleashed by the continued burning of fossil fuels.

First, let me commend the other members of the panel that have testified over the last two days. We have heard powerful voices of survivors from across the globe and we should all thank them for sharing their stories.

Today, I intend to briefly describe the history of the City's actions to address climate change, an overview of the three main themes of our current work – mitigation, or the reduction of the city's own greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation, or the preparations we're making for the changes already occurring to our climate, and accountability, holding the fossil fuel industry directly accountable for the damage we've already seen and can reasonably expect to see in the future, before taking any questions.

II. A LEGACY OF CLIMATE ACTION

First, a bit of history. In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy roared ashore and brought home the reality that climate risks could no longer be thought of as a future risk. It was here and now. And the risks are not limited to hurricanes. Rising seas, more extreme heat, and stronger precipitation events threaten as well. In response, the City released its first comprehensive climate resiliency plan and set forth a detailed risk assessment and new initiatives, launching an over \$20 billion program to prepare New York City for a future with climate change. We were a city that had been shaken to consciousness on climate change and our actions had to change.

III. ONE NEW YORK: THE PLAN FOR A STRONG AND JUST CITY

When the de Blasio administration came into office, that legacy informed our work, and we knew that we had to expand on it as well. In April 2015, Mayor de Blasio released *One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City* (OneNYC), a strategic plan for inclusive growth and climate action. OneNYC

addressed the challenges that we face as a city with a growing population, an inequality crisis, aging infrastructure, as well as the risks of climate change.

OneNYC not only looked inward and set aggressive goals to address local, interconnected challenges around climate change, poverty, and economic development – it also looked outward and recognized New York City’s place in the global landscape of sustainable development. OneNYC was the world’s first urban resilience strategy and provided a compelling model of how local governments can implement the sustainable development goals. In fact, earlier this year New York City released the world’s first voluntary local review for its efforts at achieving the global goals.

OneNYC also deepened the City’s commitment to increasing equity and addressing income inequality across the five boroughs of New York City. As Mayor de Blasio has said, our environmental sustainability work must walk hand in hand with our economic sustainability work in order to achieve a truly just and fair city for all New Yorkers.

On that point, while climate change affects everyone, its impacts are not equally shared. Simply put, the poorest and most vulnerable – who have historically contributed the least to GHG emissions – are the hardest hit by climate change. OneNYC explicitly seeks to address the disparate environmental conditions that have historically resulted in diminished health outcomes, economic opportunities, and quality-of-life in some of our city’s neighborhoods. These injustices have led to public health impacts from poor air quality, disproportionate exposure to pollution, and increased risks related to chronic exposure to extreme heat and the urban heat island effect.

Across the globe, the increasing frequency of extreme weather events and natural disasters, rising sea-levels, floods, heat waves, droughts, desertification, water shortages, and the spread of tropical and vector-borne diseases will directly and indirectly threaten human rights. We all must recognize the urgency of this challenge and take bold action to protect the human rights imperatives of the Paris Agreement. This is the only way forward.

IV. THE THREE PILLARS OF NYC’S CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

Today, we continue to deliver on the commitments of OneNYC and the Administration’s efforts to urgently address climate change, fill the void of leadership left by Washington DC, and deliver results for New Yorkers. Our work can best be summed up in three themes: sustainability, resiliency, and accountability.

Sustainability

Our climate mitigation—or sustainability—work is focused on reducing our contribution to climate change by cutting our greenhouse gas emissions as fast as possible. In OneNYC, we committed to make New York City the most sustainable big city in the world and a global leader in the fight against climate change.

To accomplish this goal, we are working to keep the city on track to meet our goal of reducing greenhouse gases 80 percent by 2050 (80x50), an effort we recently accelerated to align with the Paris Agreement’s 1.5 Celsius stretch goal. We have already achieved a 15% reduction. Getting to 80x50 means making our buildings, the largest source of GHGs in the city, much more energy efficient, expanding renewable energy options, sending zero waste to landfills by 2030, and improving our air quality.

Resiliency

Our climate adaptation—or resiliency—work focuses on adapting the city to risks of climate change, such as rising seas, more frequent and intense storms, and extreme heat. In OneNYC, we committed to making the city’s neighborhoods, economy, and public services prepared to withstand and emerge stronger from the impacts of climate change and other 21st century threats.

To accomplish this goal, we are working with many agencies to deliver on the city’s over \$20 billion resiliency investment program and institutionalizing resiliency into city operations broadly. By doing so, we’re delivering on our promise to protect all New Yorkers, along with their homes and businesses, from the impacts of climate change.

Accountability

And finally, New York City is bringing this fight straight to the fossil fuel companies that caused this climate crisis in the first place.

Let’s talk plainly. The burning of fossil fuels is the single largest contributor to human-caused climate change. Period. This simple fact was denied and buried for decades by fossil fuel companies intent on misleading policymakers and the public. Now, New York City is ending a decades-long pattern of deception and denial by holding those fossil fuel companies to account for the damage they’ve caused while taking prudent steps to protect the financial interests of New Yorkers.

What will this look like?

V. PLAN FOR DIVESTMENT AND ONGOING LAWSUIT

First, we will begin divesting our pension funds from fossil fuel reserve owners – those companies that own the oil and gas in the ground. This is a case where the prudent action to protect city pensions also lines up perfectly with good social policy to fight climate change. Fossil fuel securities have consistently underperformed the market in recent years, and the outlook for fossil fuel investments continues to be poor. According to our most recent analysis, the City’s five pension funds hold roughly \$5 billion in securities of over 100 fossil fuel reserve owners.

Working hand-in-hand with the fund trustees, New York City is pursuing divestment, consistent with prudent practice and in line with our fiduciary responsibilities. This will involve many steps, from additional analysis and trustee resolutions, to the actual process of selling the securities. The goal is to complete this divestment process as fast as possible AND by the end of 2022.

Make no mistake, this move is among the most significant divestment efforts in the world to date.

While divestment is necessary to stop investing in fossil fuels, we have another tremendous opportunity to pursue investment in the future.

Earlier this month, New York City made another important announcement. Mayor de Blasio and City Comptroller Stringer pledged that we will invest two percent of all our pension assets into renewable energy and climate solutions within the next three years. That means an investment of \$4 billion. New York City is the first U.S. city to set such a goal, and we are asking cities around the nation and around the world to join us in this effort.

Investing in climate change solutions is not only the right thing for the Earth, it's the right thing as investors and for all of the people who depend on those investments. Fossil fuel investments are toxic for our planet, and they're just as toxic for our portfolios as well.

Finally, we have filed suit against five of the investor-owned fossil fuel companies that have contributed the most to climate change – Exxon-Mobil, BP, Conoco-Phillips, Royal Dutch Shell, and Chevron. These companies knew as far back as at least the 1980s and perhaps earlier that burning fossil fuels would have ruinous impacts on the planet's atmosphere and that it would change our climate, exposing the globe to sea level rise, increased heat, and severe storms. While they deceptively encouraged and reaped the profits from our reliance on fossil fuels, cities like New York have been left to foot the bill for the harms caused by fossil fuels. Our lawsuit seeks to change that.

The impacts of climate change are no longer theoretical. It's not just happening to someone else far away. It's here and it's now. Seas have risen. Temperatures have increased. We are already spending billions to protect New York City, and much more will be needed this century to protect New Yorkers. That's why the City's federal lawsuit is seeking billions in damages to ensure that our city will be ready to withstand these impacts.

We know this will be a tough fight and could extend over several years, but the facts and the law are clearly on our side and we intend to vigorously pursue our claims and secure relief.

With these efforts, we are taking the largest combined action by any city to confront the growing climate crisis, work for climate justice, and demonstrate the global leadership necessary to win this fight against fossil fuels and the damage they've caused.

VI. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

These are just a few steps that we've taken, and we're just one place. Imagine what could happen if everyone followed this lead. We could change the world. And that leads to my last point. All of our work not only benefits New Yorkers, it also serves as a model to other cities around the nation and around the world. Which is why we partner with other cities and through networks to scale up climate solutions, support climate accountability, and pursue climate justice. Continuing to rely on fossil fuels will have catastrophic consequences, but we know there is another way.

VII. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to again thank Commissioner Cadiz and members of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and the New York City Bar Association and all of the other speakers here today for your shared commitment to a better planet. We look forward to continuing to work with you as we seek to combat the impacts of climate change.

Thank you and I welcome your questions.