

Two Cities in Transition



By Chiara Appendino
and Anton Salman

B

y 2030, all countries will be required to contribute to achieving the United Nations' approved Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). Local governments are also called upon to implement these goals. Our work on the NUR (New Urban Resources) Project fulfils our commitment to goal No. 11, the creation of more sustainable cities and communities. We set out to put this commitment into practice with reliable partners and a city that we are very close to, Bethlehem.

Conceived by the Italian city of Turin and the Palestinian city of Bethlehem with co-financing from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, the NUR Project provided us the opportunity to work together, capitalizing on a clean, renewable energy source: solar power. The city of Turin lent Bethlehem its leading experts in the field of energy transition to complement the competences of the project's technical partners.

When it comes to energy sustainability, the city of Turin can contribute a lot to international partners as it has rolled out many initiatives to benefit its citizens, thanks to a vision that has accompanied the choices of this municipal administration and that will undoubtedly help relaunch the country after the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, our city has taken part in numerous local and global projects that aim to improve energy efficiency and reduce the amount of CO₂ that is released into the atmosphere.



The mayors of Turin and Bethlehem signing the NUR Project partnership agreement.

On an international level, the Covenant of Mayors (renewed in 2019 with the new Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy) has led to significant developments, such as the adoption of the Turin Action Plan for Energy and the launch of the Climate Resilience Plan in 2020. These two programs revolve around important strategic goals that anticipate the objectives set by both the European Union and international



To make an overall difference, everyone must play a part, and individual behavior is critical: from city administrators to civil servants to private citizens.



Piazza Vittorio Veneto in Turin.

agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change.

This strategic vision has been translated into concrete actions on a local scale that aim to cut CO₂ emissions, including the planting of 50,000 trees of various species over the last five years, or recently attaining the international quality certification UNI ISO 50001, which attests to the careful handling of energy resources in buildings that belong to the city.

Our efforts are more than symbolic commitment; they constitute meaningful actions that set a positive example for the entire community.

Local environmental and energy policies, combined with international cooperation initiatives, can make our cities, and thus our planet, more sustainable. The NUR Project, which enabled Turin and Bethlehem to reinforce a virtuous path of city-city cooperation, is an example of this. Working together, we have the opportunity to improve together, making it easier to handle complex issues such as that of energy transition.

Chiara Appendino has been the mayor of Turin since 2016.

Since 2017, the Bethlehem Municipality has been directing all its efforts to create a sustainable environment in the city of Bethlehem. As a first step, to comply with the United Nations SDGs, the Bethlehem Municipality implemented a Strategic and Development Investment Plan for the years 2018–2021.

Following up on the strategic plan and based on the fruitful cooperation between Bethlehem and Turin that aims to develop both territories, the NUR (New Urban Resources) Project has begun to be implemented. Deemed the first pilot project to address renewable energy, NUR aims to contribute to achieving the United Nations SDG Nos. 7, 11, and 13.

Bethlehem's development and expansion is limited, however, due to Israeli occupation practices that include fragmenting the city, confiscating land, controlling its resources, and depriving its people of development. In addition, the city of Bethlehem, like other Palestinian cities, does not control energy or



electricity resources and is obliged to buy from an Israeli electricity company. Hence, this project has become a means to help reduce high electricity costs, particularly for the municipality's facilities and street lighting, which are added to each household's electricity bill. These efforts take Bethlehem one step closer to creating an independent energy sector.

The NUR Project helps the Bethlehem Municipality to empower citizens and raise public awareness of renewable energy. These efforts will help obtain natural resources

that can facilitate their lives and provide Bethlehem with an overall vision of environmental sustainability. It also represents a starting point for Bethlehem and its citizens to reach a green and sustainable future. We are proud to share that since 2020, the Bethlehem Christmas tree and Manger Square decorations have been lit with solar panels from the NUR Project. This sends an important message to other Palestinian cities and cities around the world about the possibility of transforming our cities into green cities and encouraging them to follow the same path.

In addition, the Bethlehem Municipality – as a member of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy – aspires to make Bethlehem a model for environmentally friendly and urban cities by the year 2040. The city will work towards reducing pollution and encouraging citizens to use environmentally friendly means of transport such as electric cars, in addition to using solar panels to reduce electrical consumption. Recently, the Bethlehem Municipality and the city of Cologne worked on the Nakoba Project to supply LED lighting units for Caritas Street and its branches. This is part of a series of projects that the municipality seeks to implement to achieve the SDGs related to clean and affordable energy.

Together with local authorities, institutions, citizens, and international partners, we will continue these great efforts to implement projects that endorse alternative energy resources and energy transition for a greener world.

Anton Salman has been the mayor of Bethlehem since 2017.



■ Bethlehem at night.

Working towards the United Nations SDGs 2030, the Bethlehem Municipality has introduced sustainable renewable energy resources to reduce electricity costs through the NUR Project, which can generate 30 percent of the energy consumed for public street lighting. Costs paid by each household for public lighting will be reduced from ILS 15 to ILS 9 monthly.

■ Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Bethlehem.

