



Addressing Agenda 21 and United Nations ‘One World’ Conspiracies

FAQ for Local Governments

In light of conspiracy theories circulated about the UN’s former Agenda 21 initiative and related misguided ideas about a “one-world” government, read on to get the facts about local government-serving organizations like ICLEI, and our role supporting cities and local governments.

What is ICLEI?

ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability is the oldest and largest nonprofit membership association devoted to local governments engaged in sustainability, climate protection, and clean energy initiatives. The organization was formerly known in the early 1990s as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

What does ICLEI do?

In the United States, ICLEI USA works to help local governments create more healthy, livable, and prosperous communities by building local resilience, tackling climate change, and supporting circular economies. To help local governments to meet their self-defined goals, we provide software tools, training, technical assistance, guidebooks, as well as vibrant peer networks where local government staff can share challenges and best practices.

Is ICLEI part of the United Nations?

ICLEI is not a United Nations agency nor controlled by the UN in any way. We are not a “foreign entity” but an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit association. In the United States, ICLEI USA is overseen by a Board of Directors consisting of local elected officials—American mayors and county executives from across the country.





What is ICLEI's international role?

ICLEI is a champion of local governments. Working with elected officials, ICLEI's World Secretariat helps voice local government needs and priorities during international negotiations and agreements that will affect local governments, such as the UN climate change conferences, e.g. Paris Climate Talks and annual COP climate conferences.

ICLEI is one of many NGOs recognized by the UN to provide input into these processes. ICLEI is the "Local Authority Major Group Co-Organizer Partner " and the "Local Government and Municipal Authority Focal Point " for UNFCCC climate change negotiations. What this means is that ICLEI ensures that local governments are not left out of discussions that might affect them: We inform local governments about these processes, and we gather and present local government priorities and points of view during key meetings and negotiations.

ICLEI does not share community data with the UN. Local governments reporting climate data, such as to CDP-ICLEI Track platform, can opt-in to having their contribution aggregated into the UN's climate commitments tracker on a voluntary basis. This process is not managed by ICLEI USA.

What is Agenda 21?

Agenda 21 was a voluntary action plan active prior to 2015 and developed by the UN and national governments at the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. At the Summit, governmental leaders around the world agreed on the need to become more sustainable—to meet today's needs without sacrificing our future. Agenda 21 presents a vision for how all levels of government—especially in the developing world—can take voluntary action to combat poverty and pollution, conserve natural resources and develop in a sustainable manner. One-hundred-seventy-eight nations adopted the agenda, including the United States under former President George H.W. Bush Administration.

Agenda 21 is not a treaty or legally binding document and does not infringe upon the sovereignty of any nation, state, or local government. Agenda 21 does not advocate for abolishing private property or have any bearing on U.S. local and state land-use decisions. In other words, it isn't being forced on anybody, anywhere, by any organization.





Is "sustainable development" the same thing as Agenda 21?

No. "Sustainability" is a mainstream concept simply referring to resources and systems that can exist in perpetuity without depletion, and sustainability initiatives in government, corporate America, academia, and local communities typically have no connection to Agenda 21. In other parts of the world, especially the developing world, local governments and other stakeholders have more directly supported the principles of Agenda 21 and worked to define their own sustainability goals based on local priorities.

What is ICLEI's relationship to Agenda 21?

At the Earth Summit, national governments, including the United States under the George H.W. Bush Administration, negotiated and wrote Agenda 21. Every sector of society was invited to give input into the Agenda 21 document, including churches/faith organizations, business-interest organizations, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, scientific associations, labor union organizations, and local government organizations.

In this context, ICLEI served the role of technical representative for a range of local government organizations, including the International Union of Local Authorities, the United Towns Organization, Metropolis, and others. ICLEI took input from these organizations regarding their key positions in areas pertinent to local government, such as urban development, water resources, and waste management, and presented these positions to UN representatives and national government representatives, who included them into the final text.

The U.S. State Department representatives of the Bush Administration encouraged local governments and ICLEI to provide input so that Agenda 21 reflected local realities.

ICLEI's view was that the only way to sensibly pursue more sustainable development was to fully engage the citizens and stakeholders of cities and local communities in defining their own plans for development. ICLEI's philosophy has always been that local democracy is key.





Does ICLEI work behind the scenes in cities and counties to implement or impose a secret agenda?

There is no truth to this conspiracy theory. ICLEI is a nonprofit with no authority over its local government members whatsoever, and we do not work in secret or in any way circumvent public input in decision-making processes. We do not mandate, impose, or enforce any national or international policies or initiatives. All ICLEI programs and projects are voluntary, and local governments decide for themselves which programs they wish to participate in; they define their own goals depending on local circumstances, interests, and abilities.

At ICLEI, we believe in the power of local, bottom-up innovations to solve global problems. We also believe in deep collaboration with our local government members to develop programs and tools to meet their needs.

