

The Toronto Declaration for Global Greenbelts: Local Solutions for Global Challenges

On March 23rd and 24th, 2011 over 210 delegates from 16 countries gathered for the first *Global Greenbelts Conference* in Toronto, Canada. Delegates identified universal and well-established benefits to people who live and work in all greenbelts and surrounding communities. The result: a call to action to establish an International Greenbelt Network. The Network will maximize greenbelt benefits, and protect and expand their boundaries.

Greenbelts are defined as protected areas, often near urban centres. A resounding message from the *Conference* is that all greenbelts can provide the following essential benefits:

- Clean water, clear air
- Long-term agricultural economic viability
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Ecosystem services
- Fresh, healthy local food
- Social inclusion, inspiration and well-being
- Beauty
- Green Infrastructure
- Nature experience and education
- Healthy, active lifestyles
- Habitat, biodiversity and landscape connectivity
- Tourism and recreation
- Flood protection
- Cultural enhancement and heritage preservation
- Thriving rural communities and sustainable urban settlements

Globally, these benefits are universal and grounded in quantifiable evidence-based, scientific methodologies. However, there are also threats. The above greenbelt functions are vital to society in light of changing global conditions such as water scarcity, population growth, climate change, rising oil prices, and food price inflation. Greenbelts are constantly faced with pressures to alter boundaries and often meet with resistance when seeking to grow and/or develop new ones. Focus and resources should be put into enhancing the worth of greenbelts to the public, decision-makers and business to create a sustainable future for our cities and rural communities.

This international network of greenbelts has agreed to collaborate and provide support to emerging and existing greenbelts by sharing research, planning tools, technical expertise, lessons learned, by developing best practices, and by helping each other achieve broad political support.

The network will include the following greenbelts:

- Agricultural Land Reserve, British Columbia, Canada
- Copenhagen Green Wedges, Denmark
- European Green Belt
- Frankfurt Greenbelt, Germany
- Green Heart, Netherlands
- Iron Curtain Greenbelt, Germany
- **England's 14 Green Belts, UK**
- Mazovia Region, Poland
- National Capital Greenbelt, Ottawa, Canada
- **Melbourne's Green Wedges, Australia**
- **Ontario's Greenbelt, Canada**
- Peri-urban Regions Platform Europe
- San Francisco Bay Area, USA
- Sao Paulo City Green Belt Biosphere Reserve, Brazil
- Waterloo Protected Countryside, Ontario, Canada