By Jean-Marie Tétart, former Secretary General of the United Towns Organization (1989-1997), Mayor of Houdan

I first began working for the Fédération Mondiale des Cités Unies et Villes Jumelées (United Towns Organization) when Pierre Mauroy was President. At his request, I developed the concept of decentralized cooperation in a more concrete manner. A cooperation that could be based on the direct relations between peoples, on friendship born and committed to a dynamic of development in the hands of local authorities, towns, cities, was established.

Very quickly a founding event was organised coinciding with the international days in Lille “Cities, motors of development”! This event was founding because, for the first time, we brought together representatives of governments, local authority associations, stakeholders, funding bodies, researchers, representatives of big NGOs to create a dialogue on development. Founding also because it was also the sign of a new direction in the dynamics of cooperation in which towns, cities and local authorities became the objects of and aid actors in development!

From the Days in Lille, the towns and cities became essential parts of cooperation programmes and aid development and increasingly assumed their role in the family of Nations!

United Cities Development, the new agency for decentralized cooperation of the World Federation was created under the presidency of Daby Diagne who was able to fully utilise his energy and imagination resulting in the progressive structuring of multiple networks of towns and cities with a regional scope.

Medcités, a network of Mediterranean cities was launched with the support of the World Bank; MedUrbs at the request of the European Union; Ciudagua dedicated to water in Latin American
Cities; Africities that allowed for the first structuration of a partnership of African cities.

It was also in these networks that the city was affirmed as an essential support in development and in giving citizens access to basic services. Through networks like Ciudagua, it was confirmed that access to services could only be organised through permanent dialogue between local authorities, decentralised levels of the State, service operators, representatives of users, and inhabitants. These ideas and steps have remained pertinent and are at the heart of the GOLD 3 report that will be presented in Rabat.

The implication of networks of cities marked all the major events and meeting that characterised the global mobilisation in favour of sustainable development, the structuring of the city movement. Istanbul, Rio, first negotiations between organisations of cities, the first negotiations with the United Nations with Jorge Sampaio as President! Historic moments!

When we get involved in a movement such as that of United Cities, we feel, a little more than others, that we are citizens of the world, we move with it, are concerned with it, are optimist with it, and understand a bit better what is happening.

United Cities, an exceptional moment of my life! A moment that continues and that never ends! And if I never move away from this movement, so much the better! When a professional or political path leads you to take other paths, you do not miss an opportunity to stay connected with this first world by all sorts of connections. So today, as President of the Parliamentary Study group “Cooperation and Development Aid”, as Vice President of the General Council of Yvelines responsible for decentralized cooperation, and as Mayor with a twinning in Casamance, I remain a militant of United Cities!

Ah, before I forget! An extended thank you to Christian, Anne, Mohamed, Edgardo, Bechir, Ouda, Marcello, Jean Louis, Fulvia, Marie Laure, and all the others!