

# A ROAD TO LEADERSHIP

The chairs were gilded. The chandeliers cascaded. The security was full metal jacket. As past evenings of chamber music hung in the air, California Governor Jerry Brown was welcomed into the 17<sup>th</sup> century Parisian *palais*, now home to the US ambassador to France. This was not the governor's personal style. Open shirt *sans* tie does not prevail as palace dress code. As the governor declined an offer of champagne passed on a silver salver, Ambassador Jane D. Hartley introduced him to fifty elite guests and an even larger number of media cameras. Governor Brown stood and launched the Subnational Global Climate Leadership Memorandum of Understanding, nicknamed "Under 2 MOU." In attendance that day, December 9, 2015, were scores of mayors, governors, premiers, and other regional signatories—officials who were publicly pledging to reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent to 95 percent of their 1990 levels by 2050. More than 100 jurisdictions, home to more than 600 million people and one quarter of the economic activity in the world, have signed on to this commitment.<sup>4</sup> Each jurisdiction has set specific midterm climate goals, and will accomplish them through projects best addressed locally, such as energy efficiency and zero-emission vehicles. This approach was a sea change from the UN's views nine years earlier.

The prevailing conceit underlying the 1997 United Nations Kyoto Agreement on climate change had been clear—a global problem like climate change could be addressed only by reduction commitments on the national or regional (European Union, for example) level. Actions taking place anywhere below nation level were derided as meaningless in effectively addressing a worldwide

problem. Even as late as 2006, at the UN Congress of the Parties (COP) 12 in Nairobi, when then-California EPA Secretary Linda Adams attempted to offer UN negotiators success stories of the state's greenhouse gas reductions, the doors were literally shut in her face.

Yet nine years later, here was a US ambassador hosting a celebration of locally based greenhouse gas reductions during the COP 21 climate meeting in Paris. It was a clear acknowledgement that the Kyoto Agreement, built upon a top-down philosophy of emissions reductions, had failed. In Paris, many nations presented a bottoms-up approach, relying on local programs to help them bring more to the table. This may prove to be a seminal reflection on how to turn the world to more measurable and practical ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.