

HABITAT

The United Nations Conference
on Human Settlements
Vancouver 1976



The Reason Why

What does it mean that the population of the world will double in the next 30 years, adding 3,500 million people to the human family?

- First, nearly all these new millions are going to live in towns and cities. That means building the equivalent of 3,500 cities of one million inhabitants each. In the world today, there are still fewer than 300 cities with one million population.
- What about housing? Even with an average family of six (too many, say demographers), 3,500 million people would need nearly 600 million housing units, more than exist in the entire world today.
- Then, think about children. At current birth-death ratios, the number of children who will be born and survive through childhood in this 30-year span will exceed 5,000 million. How many doctors, teachers, schoolrooms and playgrounds are needed for such a number of young people?

The challenge of the future is awesome. Towns and cities of the world already are in crisis, failing to provide basic facilities and services. Problems of unemployment, pollution, congestion, slums and squatter settlements, inadequate transportation, social alienation and crime are mounting everywhere. Past solutions have not worked. We need new techniques, new ideas and new forms of social organization.

This is the reason for HABITAT: The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. If you are concerned about the world your children will inherit, this conference is your business. For more information please write to:

HABITAT Information, 485 Lexington Ave., New York City 10007, U.S.A.

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Focus on Solutions

This conference will bring together in a way never before attempted the entire sweep of human settlements issues—formulating objectives, debating policies, assessing the current state of planning and programmes, evaluating alternative uses of resources and studying the role of institutions and the individual citizen.

But HABITAT will be different from conventional conferences in its strong orientation to solutions rather than simply to a definition of problems. It will bring forward and compare actual examples of methods and techniques which have already been applied successfully under diverse physical and socio-economic situations. Conference material will be designed to be practical and useful, suggesting approaches and combinations of techniques which can be adapted to meet the needs of human settlements in many parts of the world. Each nation will come to the conference to teach and to learn, but the follow-up of implementation of ideas and programmes will be primarily in national hands. HABITAT will stress the need and right to be different, to elaborate human settlements policies in accordance with real national and cultural needs.

Audio-Visual Presentations

HABITAT will introduce a major innovation in the organization of international conferences by presenting demonstrations of human settlement solutions by audio-visual means. Film and slide presentations, in full length and capsule versions, will graphically illustrate what governments are now doing around the world to improve urban and rural community life.

All governments have been asked to choose "demonstration projects" and to prepare the audio-visual presentations. Together, these will comprise a global teaching and experience exchange never before attempted on this scale. Emphasis will be on practicality and innovation. Presentations will include a statement of the problem, the approach chosen to solve it, the cost, and how the solution might be used by others.

Full length versions of these audio-visual presentations will be shown at a special Demonstration Centre in all Conference languages. Capsule versions will be viewed upon request at the official Conference sessions over closed circuit television.

Conference Structure

The work of the conference will follow two main lines. The first is the experience exchange of actual human settlement problems and solutions. The second will be a global analysis at the policymaking level of these problems as they relate to social and political systems, urban-rural relationships, land use systems, financial mechanisms, international co-operation and all other issues governments believe essential to the achievement of conference objectives.

The secretariat plan for the structure of the conference calls for a continuous plenary session and three committees. These committees will formulate recommendations to be submitted to the plenary on: 1) a global declaration of principles; 2) a programme for action at the national level; and 3) proposals for international cooperation and assistance.

Parallel Activities

The HABITAT secretariat actively encourages participation in conference related activities at the national and international level by all interested groups and organizations. At Vancouver, a HABITAT Forum for such activities will be organized by an international committee of non-governmental organizations, and methods are being worked out for an interchange of information and views between the official conference and this parallel meeting.

A service centre for non-governmental participation in parallel activities has been established in Vancouver by an international NGO Committee for HABITAT. Its address is:

NGO Committee for Habitat
P.O. Box 48360
Bentall Centre
Vancouver, B.C.
Canada.

The Preparatory Process

Through a continuing dialogue with governments, the organs of the United Nations system and professionals in human settlement fields, the conference secretariat is already at work defining the key issues, gathering documentation on problems and alternative solutions, and analyzing areas for possible national and international action to follow the meeting at Vancouver.

This process leading to the conference includes the preparation by governments of national reports on their human settlement policies, regional intergovernmental meetings of policymakers and experts, preparation of reports by specialized agencies of the United Nations and a number of private organizations and consultants, a "state of the world" report on existing human settlement conditions being prepared through the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning of the United Nations, and final preparation of the policy papers and conference documentation. Also, all during 1975, governments and specialized agencies will be preparing the audio-visual presentations.

The Preparatory Committee

The secretariat is being advised on conference preparations by a special Preparatory Committee of 56 member states. Members of this group are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Central African Republic, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Libyan Arab Republic, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Upper Volta, Uruguay, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia.

HABITAT Exhibit

The HABITAT secretariat is preparing a special exhibit on human settlement problems and solutions throughout the world. This exhibit will be made in several versions for showing in schools, public buildings, museums or outdoor exhibition grounds. It will be offered without charge to official or private organizations upon request, in most cases with no obligation to return. It will also be shown at Vancouver during the conference. Further information on the UN exhibit is available through the secretariat.

Defining Human Settlements

The term human settlements embodies an exciting new concept. It means the totality of the human community—whether city, town or village—with all the social, material, organizational, spiritual and cultural elements that sustain it. These include the physical requirements for housing, work, energy supply, transport, communications, water and sanitation; services for education, health, protection and welfare; systems of government, law and economic management; and cultural facilities for art, recreation and leisure.

Conference Objectives

Policies and programmes to meet the needs of future human settlements will never work—economically, socially, politically or morally—if they are not based on a firm commitment to achieve minimum standards of a decent existence for all people. This means that the highest priority must be given to alleviation of the plight of the most deprived strata of human society, both nationally and internationally. Within this basic premise our objectives will be:

- To proclaim and ask all nations to subscribe to a commitment pledging that the future human settlements of the world will be places of human dignity and well-being;
- To build among the peoples of the world a better understanding of human settlement problems and the challenge they will pose in the years to come;
- To demonstrate that the most pressing problems of human settlements can be solved with existing technology and systems if the political and social will can be marshalled to use them;
- To formulate a programme of international activities in support of human settlement improvements which will give priority to the strengthening of financial mechanisms and institutions dealing with these problems in developing countries.

"We must accept that the human race is now living in an era of jarring transition. We are rushing toward the day when the great part of our species will live in a previously unconceived state of compaction. We must very quickly devise physical, social and environmental responses to that condition."

"This will be the central issue, the backdrop, to all the themes and issues we will take up at Vancouver. This is the other face to the problem of population growth, and the two together are the fundamental challenge in the world today."



Enrique Peñalosa
Secretary-General,
HABITAT: The United Nations
Conference on Human
Settlements

