

UN Centre for Human Settlements

Established following the first Habitat Conference held in Vancouver in 1976, the UN Centre for Human Settlements served as the secretariat for the Habitat II Conference and is responsible for formulating and implementing UN human settlements programmes. Habitat's assistance to Governments includes technical advice, applied research, training and information.

As part of preparations for the Habitat II Conference, the Centre, located in Nairobi, Kenya, assisted developing countries in preparing national plans of action and in promoting public/private partnerships as practical ways to address urban problems. Having also developed the Housing and Urban Indicators Programme — one of the first international initiatives in data collection at the city level — the Centre will be at the heart of a UN system-wide effort to implement the Habitat Agenda.

"We are long past the time of talking about the problems. We went to Istanbul to launch a process, to challenge each other and to adopt a global plan of action, the Habitat Agenda, aimed at solutions for what is perhaps the most widely shared concern of people in all parts of the globe — where they live and how they live . . . We all have reason to be proud of the outcome. It exemplified the international system at its best . . . It was an achievement that makes the Habitat Agenda not just an expression of good intent, but a practical road map to the future of the new urban world."

*Dr. Wally N'Dow, Secretary-General
of Habitat II*

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Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements

Summary

Road Map to the Future



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United Nations

“We have come a long way from Vancouver and the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. In the last 20 years, the world has changed in dramatic ways. But the problems we faced in the 1970s have not disappeared. Poverty, hunger, disease, population imbalances, the lack of equity are still with us . . . Human settlements, and especially cities, are a key factor in the complex equations of growth and development, environmental issues, human rights and the eradication of poverty . . . Our collective response, the Habitat Agenda, embodies our vision of human settlements for cities, towns and villages that are viable, safe, prosperous, healthy and equitable. This is our vision of the common future, this must be the spirit of Istanbul.”

*Boutros Boutros-Ghali
Secretary-General of the United Nations*

Habitat II was the last in the series of major UN conferences that have shaped the world's development agenda for the coming years. It produced a global plan of action — the Habitat Agenda — that provides a blueprint for creating sustainable human settlements for the twenty-first century, taking into account their linkages with the environment, human rights, social development, women's rights, population and other related issues. The Agenda offers a positive vision of urbanization, one in which adequate shelter and basic services, a healthy and safe environment, and productive and freely chosen employment are the rule and not the exception.

Recognizing the impact of poverty and the lack of access to land and secure tenure, Habitat II identified inadequate living conditions as a primary cause of violent social conflict and diminished personal safety. And in one of its most significant actions, it reached agreement on the right to ade-

quate housing, recognizing the fundamental obligation of Governments to enable people to obtain shelter and to protect and improve homes and neighbourhoods. Habitat II also gave impetus to greater involvement of citizens' groups and private business in urban decision-making and to the sharing by national Governments of power and resources with local authorities.

The Partnership Conference

The Conference was especially notable for its strong emphasis on alliance-building and on innovative ideas. Hailed as the conference of partnerships, Habitat II was the first UN conference to give a special official voice to representatives of civil society. While most of the recent world conferences gave non-governmental organizations (NGOs) access to the conference process, Habitat II allowed local authorities, the private sector, NGOs and other groups to participate in the deliberations through a committee of their own, Committee II. In short, they were full partners, although without the right to vote.

Some 8,000 people from 2,400 organizations attended the NGO Forum parallel to the Conference, while more than 2,500 NGO representatives took part in the Conference itself.

The forging of partnerships among national and local governments, other public institutions, the private sector, youth, women and NGOs in solving urban problems was one of the key accomplishments of Habitat II.

In addition to the Conference committee that conducted negotiations among national Governments, Committee II — or the “partnership committee”, as it became known — met and forwarded recommendations for inclusion in the Habitat Agenda. Committee II received reports from more than 500 mayors and key municipal leaders, constituted as the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities. It also heard from NGOs grouped in forums, including the World Business Forum, the Foundations Forum, the Academies of Science and Engineering Forum, the Professionals and Researchers Forum, the Parliamentarians Forum, the Labour Unions Forum and the Forum on Human Solidarity.

Best Practices

Habitat II also highlighted the importance of exchanging information on ways to address human settlements problems, by showcasing “best practices” for improving the living environment — initiatives and models of innovative thinking by local authorities and grass-roots organizations. These programmes have proven effective in areas such as poverty eradication, managing the urban environment and providing access to land, shelter and finance.

At Istanbul, 12 award-winning best practices were selected for special recognition, out of over 600 submitted for consideration, all of which had resulted in tangible improvements in people's lives. As Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said at the Conference, “They represent the spirit of invention, innovation, courage and commitment. They demonstrate that positive change and sustainable human settlement development are indeed possible.”

The Habitat II Agreements

The Istanbul Declaration

In the 15-paragraph Declaration, Governments highlighted the seven main priorities of the Habitat Agenda:

- **Unsustainable consumption and production patterns, particularly in industrialized countries;**
- **Unsustainable population changes;**
- **Homelessness;**
- **Unemployment;**
- **Lack of basic infrastructure and services;**
- **Growing insecurity and violence; and**
- **Increased vulnerability to disasters.**

While concerned by the continuing deterioration of human settlements in most parts of the world, Governments recognized cities and towns as centres of civilization, generating economic development and social, cultural, spiritual and scientific

advancement. Governments further acknowledged that advancing the goals of the Habitat Agenda will require concerted action in the areas of development financing, external debt, international trade and transfer of technology.

Committed in the Declaration and the Habitat Agenda to the full and progressive realization of the right to housing, Governments agreed to seek the participation of their public, private and non-governmental partners to ensure legal security of tenure, protection from discrimination and equal access to adequate housing. Governments also called for urban policies that expand the supply of affordable housing by enabling markets to perform efficiently in a socially and environmentally responsible way.

Governments agreed to strengthen local authorities' financial and institutional capacities to implement the Agenda. As the Conference's Secretary-General, Wally N'Dow, put it: "The resources exist to put a roof over the head and bring safe water and sanitation, for less than \$100 per person, to every man, woman and child on this planet".

The Habitat Agenda

The Conference's action plan, the Habitat Agenda, is intended as a global call to action at all levels and a guide aimed at achieving sustainable development of the world's cities, towns and villages in the first two decades of the next century. The Agenda contains a statement of goals and principles, a set of commitments to be undertaken by Governments and final strategies for implementing the plan of action.

Goals and principles

- *Equitable human settlements where all have equal access to housing, open space, health services and education, among others;*
- *Poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development;*
- *The importance to quality of life of physical conditions and spatial characteristics of villages, towns and cities;*
- *The need to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society.*

- *Citizens' rights and responsibilities;*
- *Partnerships among all countries and among all sectors within countries;*
- *Solidarity with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups;*
- *Increased financial resources; and*
- *Health care, including reproductive health care and services to improve the quality of life.*

Commitments — Highlights

Adequate shelter for all

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the right to adequate housing has been recognized as an important part of the right to an adequate standard of living. Substandard housing, unsafe water and poor sanitation in densely populated cities are responsible for 10 million deaths worldwide every year.

To address these problems, Governments committed themselves, among other things, to:

- *Providing legal security of tenure and access to land to all people;*
- *Promoting access for all to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation;*
- *Promoting broad access to appropriate housing financing;*
- *Implementing accessibility standards for disabled persons; and*
- *Increasing the supply of affordable housing.*

Sustainable human settlements

Most of the world's gravest environmental threats to air quality, water quality, waste disposal and energy consumption are worsened by the high density and activity of urban life. Today, 600 million people live in life and health-threatening situations in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

At Istanbul, Governments committed themselves to developing societies that make efficient use of resources, taking into account the carrying capacity of ecosystems. Other objectives include:

- *Creating an enabling environment for economic and social development and environmental protection that will attract investment;*
- *Enhancing the potential of the informal and private sectors in job creation;*
- *Promoting the upgrading of informal settlements and urban slums, as appropriate;*
- *Improving access to work, goods and services through promotion of efficient, quiet and environmentally sound transportation systems; and*
- *Eliminating as soon as possible the use of lead in gasoline.*

Enablement and participation

To create opportunities for citizens to participate in local decision-making and to develop innovative solutions to problems, Governments committed themselves to the following goals:

- *Promoting democratic rule and the exercise of public authority in ways that ensure accountable, just and effective governance of towns and cities;*
- *Decentralizing authority and resources to the level where needs are most effectively addressed; and*
- *Ensuring the availability of education for all.*

Gender equality

Women often have unequal access to resources such as property, credit, training and technology, a situation that makes it harder for them to improve their living standards and those of their children. To

change this, Governments committed themselves to the main goals of:

- *Integrating gender perspectives in human settlement legislation, policies and programmes; and*
- *Strengthening policies and practices to promote the full and equal participation of women in human settlements planning and decision-making.*

Financing human settlements

Recognizing that the housing and shelter sector is a productive sector and should, therefore, be eligible for commercial financing, Governments committed themselves to developing innovative approaches for financing the Agenda's recommendations. In addition, they agreed to:

- *Strengthen financial management at all levels; and*
- *Promote equal access to credit for all people.*

International cooperation

Governments committed themselves to:

- *Participating in multilateral, bilateral and regional programmes to further the goals of the Habitat Agenda;*
- *Promoting exchange of appropriate technology;*
- *Striving to fulfil the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of the developed countries for official development assistance to developing countries; and*
- *Promoting responsive international cooperation between public, private, non-profit, non-governmental and community organizations.*

Assessing progress

Governments committed themselves to:

- *Implementing the Habitat Agenda within their countries and monitor-*

ing progress towards that goal, using appropriate data collection methods; and

- *Assessing, with a view to revitalizing, the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).*

Strategies for implementing the Agenda

The Strategies describe:

- *Action to be taken to achieve adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world;*
- *Ways to promote efficient land markets and sustainable land use;*
- *Ways to mobilize financing and facilitate access to land and security of tenure;*
- *Actions that Governments can take to integrate shelter policies with macro-economic, social and environmental policies; and*
- *Actions to improve shelter delivery systems.*

UN Follow-up

At the Conference, UN agencies recognized the need to translate the results of Habitat into action in cities, towns and villages. Central to this work is promoting South-South and North-South cooperation in dealing with urban management and human settlements development with an emphasis on poverty alleviation. The World Bank announced that funds earmarked for urban programmes amount to \$15 billion over the next five years — a tripling of the Bank's effort in this sector.

In the spirit of inclusion that characterized Habitat II, the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has initiated a Partners Programme that will expand cooperation with a whole range of actors in civil society, including local authorities, NGOs, the private sector and professional associations. Working together, these partners are actively implementing human settlements programmes

inspired by the Habitat Agenda. In addition, Habitat's Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme will continue to foster the exchange of lessons learned through a global network of institutions and organizations.

In other action, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and three donor countries — The Netherlands, New Zealand and Switzerland — launched the Project Development Facility, a new \$10 million initiative to promote private investment in urban areas. The funds will be used for 50 projects in developing country cities over a five-year period. These are expected to generate \$1 billion in investments in energy, water and waste management. The new Facility is part of the Public-Private Partnership for the Urban Environment, an initiative to promote cooperation between the city governments and the private sector and to help ensure that these collaborations are environmentally sustainable.

UNDP also announced that it would contribute \$15 million to the Urban Management Programme, a joint initiative of UNDP, the World Bank and the UN Centre for Human Settlements, which acts as the Programme's executing agency. Supported by The Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, the Programme provides technical assistance to developing country cities and towns to find ways to alleviate poverty and to strengthen cooperation with local enterprises, NGOs and other groups. It is the world's largest multi-donor technical assistance programme in the area of urban development.

The Conference gave a central role to the United Nations in monitoring the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, charging the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with coordinating implementation of the Agenda throughout the UN system. Habitat II invited ECOSOC to review the follow-up to the Habitat Agenda in 1997 and suggested that it should convene a high-level meeting with UN specialized agencies by the year 2001. The Conference also asked the United Nations General Assembly to consider holding a special five-year appraisal session on Habitat II in 2001. From 1996 to 2001, the UN Commission on Human Settlements, assisted by the UN Centre for Human Settlements, will continuously monitor and promote progress made in achieving the goals of Habitat II.