

Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II

FORUM on HUMAN SOLIDARITY

Istanbul, 8 June 1996

'The City Summit' is more than a conference. It is a recognition by the international community ... an awakening, if you will ... that time is running out on us, that if we want to save the future, we have no choice other than to find answers today. The problems now facing our cities and towns are a serious threat to local as well as national stability, a threat to global peace.

Wally N'Dow

Secretary General

Second UN Conference on Human Settlements

Habitat II

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Human Solidarity, a Force that Builds Community

Background

The city is humanity's most vibrant creation, a living organism that pulses with our hopes, inspirations, and failures; it reflects our diverse personalities and our most powerful emotions. Indeed, if there is a common denominator in the world of today – an experience that people all over share and that, in a sense, unites them – it is to be found in the unique interrelationship that exists between a city and its people caught up in an historic and dramatic transition that is the mark of our rapidly urbanizing planet, a planet on which human solidarity may be our only salvation.

The future of our human settlements – from hamlet, village to city to megalopolis – will not be determined by 'bricks and mortar' alone.

More housing is needed and rebuilding decaying infrastructure is essential – the litany is a long and familiar one. But for all we do about it, the malaise that now eats at the heart of our cities, will not disappear unless we also pay attention to the urban soul, unless we advance the human solidarity that transforms the built environment into human – and humane – settlements.

History, geography, and social change create the context for human solidarity; rational processes build cities, but faith, loyalty, honor, and trust among its members create communities. Beyond 'bricks and mortar,' cities and towns need social capital as a basis for a civil society essential to individual and collective prosperity and satisfaction.

Human solidarity is based on shared values that generate community bonds and social trust, the bedrock of healthy human settlements.

Can these elements be identified, measured, quantified, and incorporated into the continuing process of successfully planning, building, and re-building urban communities for the next century?

Can human solidarity bridge the gap between human needs and sustainable natural environments?

Can it create the conditions we need for people to live together as good neighbors?

Can we realistically hope to achieve it?

The Forum on Human Solidarity will seek to define both the tangible and intangible aspects of human solidarity, even as it probes the shared values that promote it. Above all, it will try to frame an acceptable code of behavior celebrating our global diversity and the continuing nature of our common humanity.

Points of Departure

* *By nature, people are nearly alike; by practice they get to be wide apart.*

- Confucius 551-479 B.C.

Solidarity among people is the sense of cooperation or fellowship that arises from common responsibilities or interests, from a community of attitudes and values. Despite differences of class, race, religion, it is that need which impels people to work together. Nowhere is that human cooperative spirit better illustrated than in the cities of the world. Urban life demands human solidarity to survive and to balance social, economic, environmental and political demands. Individual freedom and creativity foster a synergy of intense human interaction.

If urban life demonstrates the highest achievement of human solidarity, urban life may also destroy it. Humanity at close quarters is most creative but also most vulnerable. The strains of propinquity, vast disparities in wealth, housing, sanitation, nourishment, and health care can be destructive; moral relativities make the urban soil ripe for crime and disease; with continuing environmental degradation cities may breed as much human misery as they do human glory. Cities represent a unique human achievement; they are our longest surviving artifacts and greatest challenge to the 21st century.

Urban life, and the solidarity it engenders, has always been able to prosper and contend with change. Historically, cities have been both the cause and effect of change and have often successfully absorbed the consequences. But the rate of change has increased so dramatically as to push cities into crisis. New skills of adaptation to change will be needed to convert crisis to opportunity. The global challenge to improve shelter, infrastructure, transportation and environment are all primarily urban, so efforts to solve these problems must be urban.

Solidarity allows people to move in the same direction. *Human* solidarity is the *spirit* of people moving in the same direction based on a sense of shared humanity, linked by common goals beyond individual nation states. Communities are often fragmented and narrowly motivated; *human* solidarity is inclusive and healing. Focusing on human needs allows a consensual community to emerge. It is in the world's human settlements where solidarity can be achieved, nurtured or destroyed.

Humanity has needs that only the city can provide. The Forum will explore how the city – and the ever-growing part of humanity that depends on it – can survive and how human solidarity necessary for that survival can be stimulated and nurtured.

* Close by the Rights of the Person, ... are the Rights of the Spirit.
- Victor Hugo 1802–1885

The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, five decades ago proclaimed certain civil rights; paralleling these are the *rightful claims* of community, reflecting commitment of individual to individual and to the community. A balance between individual and community rights is characteristic of urban life and engages loyalty and solidarity between fellow citizens. The 'tragedy of the commons' occurs where rights are not linked to obligations. Rights and obligations are defined by consensus, and a social contract that commits people to be responsible for their individual and collective actions.

Community solidarity harnesses the human spirit to the human will, and this spurs community action. The physical needs and spiritual aspirations of people and their communities are timeless; they demand solidarity of effort which has a special place in the urban environment. The world's fast-growing and transforming cities pose a challenge of identifying, nurturing and preserving the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place that leads to commitment and a sense of belonging. Shared interests and responsibilities define solidarity as a positive force that enables urban life to prosper and contend with rapid change.

Change is inevitable, continuous and the only permanent element in life.

Recently cities have become centers of changing international relations. Throughout history they have provided the crossroads of economic and social exchange as well as political emancipation. The 'key to the city' still implies great honor, social acceptance, based on freedom and security.

Shared goals and objectives of an urban community leading to cooperation, agreement, and consensus for action, require human solidarity as the basis for specific solutions. Hope for human progress lies in the recognition that whatever our diversity, humanity has comparable needs everywhere. Cities are interdependent because they are interactive. They form a global network separate from the traditional powers of nation states. Cities have developed unique sites for unique economic, social and cultural purposes, by enlisting human solidarity to guide their future.

Human solidarity involves stewardship for each other and the resources underlying individual and community life. Stewardship of land in particular implies unique obligations to a fixed and irreplaceable resource. Private and public use must involve community stewardship while guaranteeing individual use and enjoyment.

How can private needs and community requirements be balanced? How can stewardship of resources be implemented with justice and equity?

* *Nor was civil society founded merely to preserve the lives of its members; but that they might live well: for otherwise a state might be composed of slaves, or the animal creation ... nor is it an alliance mutually to defend each other from injuries, or for a commercial intercourse.*
- Aristotle 384–322 B.C.

The human being is the measure of all things. Public policy is best evaluated relative to the impact on individuals. Local and national governments weighing policy choices need to match civil society - how citizens spontaneously and voluntarily interact - with governing legislation. Civil society is the natural, organic expression of the 'sociable human' to which civic government conforms.

While civil society reflects humanity fully, how are we to structure governance to reflect the organic society and measure public choices by the impact on the individual and community in a highly dynamic context?

* *In great cities people are brought together by the desire of gain. They are not in a state of co-operation, but of isolation, as to the making of fortunes; and for all the rest they are careless of neighbors. Religions teach us to love our neighbor as ourself; modern society acknowledges no neighbor.* - Benjamin Disraeli 1804–1881

Conviviality - sociable human interaction in good company - is the cheerful side of human solidarity. Neighborliness reflects solidarity in its most joyous sense. A convivial community celebrates individual diversity, maintains the option of privacy, and empowers solidarity. Tolerance of differences is easier if the individual occasionally can choose to retreat to the private sphere although conviviality requires 'collision' among people. Individuals choose freely to participate in the collective only if it is convivial and productive.

What are the things we can do to engender conviviality within a community?

✱ *I claim that in losing the spinning wheel we lost our left lung. We are, therefore, suffering from galloping consumption. The restoration of the wheel arrests the progress of the fell disease.*

-Mohandas K. Gandhi 1869-1948

The prescription for improving human settlements often includes a return to a simple, pastoral, agrarian life. Glorification of uncomplicated economic production, close relations with the land, and small-scale self-sufficiency is a romantic response to the "fell disease" of progress. The sentiment towards human values is valid; but denying that the city offers human rewards denies the history of civilization. 'Civilization' and 'citizenship' both attest to the role played by the 'city' in achieving social, economic and political progress. Cities were created for human ends of freedom, culture, and creativity. Human progress has stemmed in some way from the synergy of human energies created and nurtured in cities. A balanced relationship and an adequate sharing of responsibilities between cities and their hinterland is urgent. Rural and urban areas are interdependent economically, socially and environmentally. Sustainable cities depend on sustainable development of rural settlements aiming at comparable improvements in living and working conditions.

How can we build human scale and social values into cities while preserving the benefits of community synergy and economic progress?

✱ *Wasted, polluted, corrupted earth, filled with junked cars and old iron, is more than just sloppy and ugly. It spells indifference to human need, a wanton neglect of fundamental decencies.* - Barbara Ward 1914-1981

Neglect of our community brings self-neglect in a spiral of cause and effect. A city's natural environment speaks to our souls as biological beings and touches us in the daily cycle that shapes our humanity. The enormous cultural contribution of the city stems from 'connectedness' among people who are themselves joined to an organic rhythm of birth and death. Cities resemble living organisms. Enhancing cities' natural environments is a biological necessity and affirms humanity.

How can we nurture and enhance the natural environment while allowing the city's economic, cultural and social mission to flourish and unfold?

- * *Since human beings are as much the product of their total environment as of their genetic endowment, it is theoretically possible to improve the lot of people by manipulating the environmental factors that shape people's nature and condition people's destiny. In the modern world, urbanization and technology are certainly among the most important of these factors... - René Dubos 1901-1982*

Over half of the world's population is urban, and that proportion is growing. Technology demands both geographic density, and allows for it. The technological scope to manipulate city infrastructure is enormous; the solidarity of purpose to shape that environment to human ends remains paramount. The harmonious interaction between people and their physical community requires social capital and commitment to resolve differing economic, social, environmental and political objectives.

How can technology and human organization be managed to enhance human settlements and thereby balance economic, social and environmental needs?

- * *Two things [...] are astonishing: the changeableness of most human behavior and the strange stability of certain principles. People are constantly on the move, but the spirit of humanity seems almost unmoved. - Alexis de Tocqueville 1805–1859*

The *genius loci* - the distinctive pervading spirit of a place - is built on unchanging common human needs for sustenance, reproduction, security, and spiritual meaning. While people's needs to survive appear to be universal, the spirit of solidarity in communities is defined by differences in how survival is achieved. Modernization threatens to erode distinctive local forms, thus, the *genius loci* provides a weakening touchstone for community solidarity. Just as individuals define themselves in a balance between their desire both to belong and to be different, so do communities. 'Modern' urban life will continue to dilute the material expression of distinctive cultures.

How might the *genius loci* be articulated and augmented in response to modernization to strengthen community solidarity?

* *Spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on which it feeds and restores them to matter in the form of movements which it has stamped with its own freedom. - Henri Bergson 1859–1941*

Prevailing materialism supports the idea that human worth is measured by human production. While survival demands that people act materially, the impulse to survive lies in the human spirit. A city's function is to convert energy into form, structures into the symbols of culture, and biological reproduction into creative humanity. Cities historically have embodied 'freedom' as indentured peasants/serfs sought the protection of city walls and urban institutions. To strive for freedom from hunger, disease, ignorance, and fear of others, may diminish the choice of spirit over material survival.

How can an urban future emerge where human solidarity cumulatively achieves material progress without succumbing to materialism?

* *Just as on a heap of rubbish / Thrown upon the highway / Grows the lotus sweetly fragrant / And delighting the heart. - Buddha c.563–c.483 B.C.*

Human nature's tendency is to rise beyond the human condition, and to forge meaning, progress, and ultimately happiness out of the physical environment available. Cities are the result of transformation from what exists to what is imagined in the human heart. The dynamic of improving city life is to acknowledge what physical resources exist, and nurture those dreams able to transform them.

Ideas are no substitute for action, but no effective action is possible without the vision provided by ideas. Successful urbanization – the transformation and modernization of life – demands human solidarity to create communities, in thought, vision, and deeds. Barbara Ward anticipated the 'global village' and its need for human solidarity: "Loyalty may be the key... All loyalty is based on two elements - the hope of protection and the hope of enhancement." Human solidarity addresses both elements.

Questions the Forum will address

The Forum will bring together a group of internationally-known and accomplished individuals representing social, cultural, economic and geographic global diversity and experience. Under the guidance of the Moderator, the group will present individual points of view in the morning and engage in a broad-ranging cross-cultural discussion in the afternoon. While each participant will have had a chance to present particular ideas, the discussion is intended to be spontaneous, informal and provocative. The audience of 500-600 invited guests will be drawn into the discussion as time and opportunity will allow. It is expected that the Forum will meet in an historic building apart from the official UN Conference, providing a friendly and relaxed atmosphere characteristic of Istanbul's unique architectural heritage.

Upon the Forum's conclusion a succinct statement reflecting diversity of viewpoints as well as emerging consensus will be prepared for consideration by *Committee II* of the official UN Conference. This will allow for the inclusion of the Forum's statement in the *Habitat Agenda* so as to highlight the urgent need for human solidarity in developing workable solutions for improving human settlements.

The Forum will seek to define both the tangible and intangible aspects of human solidarity by probing the shared values that promote it and by asking:

1. What are the shared values of humanity that generate community bonds and social trust, the bedrock of healthy human settlements?
2. Can these elements be identified, measured, quantified?
3. Can these elements be incorporated into the continuing process of successfully planning, building and re-building urban communities for the next century?
4. Can human solidarity bridge the gap between human needs and sustainable natural environments?
5. Can human solidarity create the conditions necessary for people to live together as good neighbors?
6. Can we – by marshalling local, national and international efforts – realistically hope to achieve it?
7. Can we create an acceptable Code of Behavior celebrating our global diversity and our common humanity? What would be the essential elements of such a code?

Instructions and advice for participants

from
Robert MacNeil
Moderator

As moderator for the Forum on Human Solidarity in Istanbul, I am grateful that you have given us your valuable time, and to make the best use of your presence I propose a few ground rules. I'm sure we all want to produce a coherent and vigorous discussion, a real exchange of views. We have all had experience of conferences where participants simply make long speeches at each other. To avoid that and encourage real interaction among you, I ask each of you to cooperate in the following steps:

1. **Summary in advance.** As soon as possible, but **no later than May 20**, please fax to 604-736-7465 (in Vancouver, Canada) a brief summary of points you would like to make. Only with such information in advance will I be able to guide the discussion intelligently and give due weight to points you each consider important.
2. **Sharing the time.** The Forum will be divided into two three-hour sessions, morning and afternoon. My plan is to use the morning session to hear individual preliminary remarks and begin a discussion, then open the afternoon to full interaction and dialogue. Some time at the morning session will be devoted to opening remarks by Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary General, and Dr. Wally N'Dow, Secretary General Habitat II.
3. **Five minutes, please.** With twenty participants, the remaining morning time will evaporate unless we put strict time limits on each of your first interventions. Therefore I ask you to confine your prepared opening statement to **five minutes**. Five minutes usually means 700-800 words, or three double-spaced pages of typed manuscript, the length of a typical newspaper column or commentary. If you exceed this limit, you will eat into your colleagues' time and I will be obliged to interrupt. A trifle draconian, perhaps, but it will insure a much livelier and stimulating session than would be the case with long set speeches.

The attached statement, **Human Solidarity, a Force that Builds Communities**, and the **Questions the Forum will Address** are intended to help everyone to focus our thoughts.