



Habitat II

Highlights of the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat II

Despite the many philosophical and political differences on issues before the Preparatory Committee, there was a spirit of cooperation demonstrated by delegations. There has been a universal desire to achieve consensus and a willingness to listen to other points of view. This has led to significant progress.

* Intensive negotiations on the Global Plan of Action have led to resolution of a number of key issues and, by the end of the meeting, approximately 70 per cent of the document was unbracketed. Issues still to be resolved include the right to housing, resources for implementation of the commitments, post-Conference follow-up and specific issues related to NGO accreditation.

* This PrepCom proved that local authorities, private sector and NGOs can effectively contribute to the work of the developmental side of the UN and are an integral part of the solutions. There was a two-day meeting of the steering committee of the Local Authorities for Habitat II and they offered contributions to the formal and informal negotiations throughout the PrepCom.

* Another significant element was the involvement of Global Parliamentarians, who met to discuss Habitat and provide input into the PrepCom discussions. It is envisioned that they will have an increasingly important role in preparatory discussions and at Istanbul.

* After vigorous debate, the goal of gender equality in human settlements development was incorporated in the document. There were initiatives to reinforce the decisions taken at Beijing regarding gender equality, particularly in the areas of access to land, shelter and inheritance rights.

* Dr. Wally N'Dow announced the creation of the Huairou Commission on Gender issues. He was joined by several members of the Commission, who were appointed during the Beijing Conference, including Bella Abzug. Ms. Abzug challenged Dr. N'Dow to ensure that negotiations on gender equity and related issues did not lose ground from the Beijing Conference. Dr. N'Dow assured her of his commitment to action on that question and emphasized that he will be making a strong effort to move that agenda forward.

The Mandate of the Huairou Commission is:

- to highlight women's concerns in the development of sustainable human settlements
- to ensure that the Agenda reflects women's central decision-making roles and responsibilities
- to develop a program for women's organizational capacity-building
- to identify and publicize Best Practices which reflect women's input and concerns.

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* The looming urban water crisis was highlighted at a press conference by Dr. N'Dow, who emphasized that water could be the source of potential conflict in the near future. He was joined by China's Vice Minister of Construction, Mr. Li Zhendong, who talked about activities planned for World Water Day, whose global observance will be in Beijing, China on 22 March 1996.

* Dr. N'Dow also attended a press conference organized by the Youth for Habitat II and reiterated his support for their activities. The Youth priorities are sustainable human settlements, civic responsibility, access to education and employment and involvement of youth in the decision-making process.

* Best Practices is one of the good news stories of this Prepcom. The Prepcom saw significant support for the program from member states and over 500 submissions have been received to date from around the world. It was announced that Canada and the Metropolitan Government of Toronto will be sponsoring the Best Practices selection jury, which will meet March 28-29, 1996.

* At the PrepCom there was also a recognition that the UNCHS (Habitat) has played a key role in developing innovative strategies for urban renewal at the local level and a discussion of the need for coordinated implementation and follow-up of commitments made at Istanbul.

The conference ended on a positive note as Dr. N'Dow said, "In three months, these debates will be pursued at Istanbul. We still have a lot of work to do, however, I am confident that most, if not all, of these issues will be resolved there. The important thing is that we continue to work together in the spirit of cooperation and stimulate progress in the United Nations system and international cooperation.

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