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The Home of Man:
What Nations and the International Community Must Do

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"One of the most hopeful developments of the Seventies is the degree to which world society has begun to examine, seriously and together, what one might call the basic facts of "planetary housekeeping". The U.N. Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in 1972 set the trend. Since then, we have seen the consideration of world population at Bucharest, of world food at Rome, of the role and status of women at Mexico City and at repeated sessions of the U.N. General Assembly - and most recently at UNCTAD's deliberations at Nairobi - an urgent discussion of the new economic order, in other words of the overall calculus of interest and advantage in the global economy and, with it, a deepening sense of the need to end of old colonial injustices and distortions and create some kind of new, more just and more balanced economic order.

But at no conference have all the aspects of man's daily living been brought together more comprehensively than here at Habitat, the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements. Nearly everything that happens to the human race happens in its settlements and although the task of considering everything on a global basis may seem an impossible one, there is the counter-argument, felt more and more strongly as people reflect more rationally on their ways of life, that most human activities are profoundly interconnected. Take food or population or science and technology or women's status or whatever other vital issue out of the context in which they

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are actually experienced and we may need from time to time to correct our vision by fitting them back into the continuum of daily life which is where their real impact is experienced. The Stockholm Conference had an important element of this sense of interconnexion. Vancouver is host to the next great effort to examine global human experience not in all its "minute particulars" but in the close web of inter-dependence which holds it all together and largely determines the impact of each separate part.

Admittedly to study a whole context is forbiddingly difficult and the danger of looking at everything is that one can end up by seeing nothing. But the risk must be taken from time to time. Man is more than his brain or his liver or his heart. A society is more than its population problem, its food problem, its energy problem and so forth: they all come together in the human settlement. It is only by examining them there that we can avoid the fate of the man in the Bible who first looked in the mirror and then went away and "forgot what manner of man he was".

So let us look in the mirror. Where are we in our settlements? What is happening to us? Where are we tending in our planetary existance? These are questions we cannot answer unless we stand off a little from the daily turmoil and try to see ourselves in some sort of historical perspective. Of course, some will say, with Henry Ford, that history is "bunk", in other words, what is going on now is much too different from anything that has already happened that comparisons are not odious but simply useless. But it is not unreasonable to suspect that Santayana was nearer the truth when he said that those who will not learn from history are destined to repeat it. Modern man has a long history to learn from and a great deal of it should not, at all costs, be repeated. So it is surely safer to see what the historical perspective can tell us about our present plight.

Broadly speaking, we can say that the human race is just about half way through its entry into the technological and urban order. The changes are on an even more vast and radical a scale than any previous fundamental change in the human condition. The last two upheavals in man's total way of life - the invention of settled agriculture some 20,000 years ago, the invention of the city about 5,000 years ago - changed much and laid the groundwork for modernity. But they were slow and scattered and did not involve simultaneously the entire planet. Our new transformation - to the science-based high technology, urban society - began to gather

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momentum between the 16th and 18th Century with the steady development of accurate measurement, scientific observation and practical inventions which, applying mechanical energy and a deepening grasp on the nature of chemical elements to man's daily work, brought the bulk of economic activity out of the fields to the cities, sucked in the manpower to work the new power-driven machinery in the factories and set in motion an urbanizing process which in the most developed societies has by now reduced the numbers working directly in agriculture to under 10 percent of the workforce and consigned nearly 80 percent of the people to settlements of over 20,000 inhabitants.

For the quarter of humanity that are more or less through to this urban condition, the process has taken a couple of centuries. But everything is speeding up in the 20th Century. For the two-thirds of humanity who still have over 70 percent of thei people on the farms, the percentage of people in the countryside may have dropped to about half in the next three decades. A predominantly "urban planet" could be not much more than fifty or sixty years ahead.

If for a moment we disregard the speeding up of the process, it is not altogether irrational to look back at the past history of already developed countries and see how matters stood when they, like the whole planet today, were roughly halfway along towards fullscale industrialization and urbanization. If we take the pioneer Britain - coming up to the middle of the 19th Century, we may find some useful analogies. The fact that they are not very reassuring should not deter us. The present condition of our planet is not very reassuring either. And at least on some critical issues Britain has done rather better since. So it offers not only a warning. There are also some small prospects of hope.

In the 1840s, a prime factor in Britain was an astonishing skew in the distribution of wealth - the vast new resources poured out by the new machines went overwhelmingly to the owners and managers. It seems probable that between 1800 and 1850 the share of the labourers and mechanics did not increase at all while dukes and earls lucky enough to have coal under their properties or cities advancing on their farms were able, as the Earl of Durham put it, to "jog along" on the modern equivalent of untaxed income of two to three million dollars a year. Disraeli called Britain "two nations - the nation of the rich and the nation of the poor" and the disparities showed up in very vital statistics. The better-off in

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Manchester, for instance, lived, on average, twice as long as the labourers - although, in that noisome city, even the wealthy average was under forty years. Infantile mortality was as high as in any modern favela and, at five or six, the children were packed off - manacled if they were paupers - to work at the looms and as often as not fall into them. The first legislation passed to remedy their plight can still leave us a little stunned. Their hours were reduced to twelve hours a day in stupefying heat, noise and danger. It took a strong ten-year-old to survive such exposure.

The dirt and pollution of these early industrial centers would give any modern environmentalist cardiac arrest. Here is a description of Manchester's main river in the 1840s:

> "A narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream full of debris and refuse which it deposits on the shallow right bank. In dry weather, a long strong of the most disgusting blackish, green slime pools are left standing on the bank, from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly rise and give forth a stench unendurable even on the bridge forty or fifty feet above the surface of the stream."

Interestingly enough the writer is Friedrich Engels and he is sending his account to a friend called Karl Marx.

And over all the poor hung the old fear of recurrent hunger. Cobbet tells us that the Lancashire textile workers survived on oatmeal and water. When the looms were mechanized, Europe's weavers literally starved to death. Then the bad harvests of the Forties - the Hungry Forties - plus the potato blight produced famine in Ireland and stringency all over industrializing Europe. If anyone wants to read about the settlements of this early industrial age, there they are in all their raw and ruthless misery in the pages of Dickens' novels - Hard Times, Bleak House - or, less poetically but even more painfully in such official documents as Britain's Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population, an unrelieved report of misery, foul water, filthy tenements, endless labour and early death.

No-one can deny that conditions today in many parts of our planetary economy are uncomfortably close to the Dickensian horror stories. The skew in world income is as great. The already developed peoples - North America, Europe, the Soviet Union,

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Japan - are the latter-day dukes, commanding over 70 percent of the planet's wealth for less than a quarter of the population. And in all too many developing countries the economic growth of the last two decades has been almost entirely appropriated by the wealthiest ten percent of the people. The comparisons in health, length of life diet, literacy all work out on the old Victorian patterns of unbelievable injustice. Between the 1900 pounds of grain, all but 150 pounds eaten in the form of wastefully processed animal products (and alcohol) of the rich American or Russian and the average Indian's 400 pounds direct consumption of grain, the gap is as great as the one between Cobbet's labourer and Charles Dickens' descriptions of Mr. Merdle's ten-course London dinners. To the old environmental degradations of stinking sewers and foul water are now added the more refined effluents of chemical industries warmed up with waste heat from power stations. Indeed, in many ways the picture is more bleak. In the 19th Century, agricultural productivity was rising and the vast temperate lands of North and South America, Southern Russia and Australia were about to be brought under the plough. The shadow of hunger passed after the 1840s. But it hangs over the world like a vast thunder-head today with grain reserves down to 20 days consumption and all of the surplus provided by a sometimes drought-prone North America. Nor, in many areas, is productivity in farming on the increase. Or if it is, it is by capital intensive methods which drive still more of the increasing rural population away to the cities, to casual and uncertain employment, to polluted air and water and to all the indignities of desperate poverty beside the shining skyscrapers of the new rich.

Again in the 19th Century, the workforce was only rising by about 0.7 percent a year and what the new industries needed was still unskilled labour - "hands" - even the hands of ten-year-olds. By the time machines and processes demanded better skills, the workers had become settled town-dwellers with literacy, experienc greater confidence, working wives, smaller families, more organization and trade. By historical good luck, the cities were not swamped. There was a measure of balance between in-migration and employment. Today, the workforce grows by 2 percen a year. Yet, to an increasing degree, industry wants skills, not hands. The classic example of a plastic sandals factory in Latin America knocking out 15,000 artisans and providing work for 40 machinists is not unhappily apocryphal. So when the rural poor arrive in the urban areas, it is the push off the farms, not the pull into industrial jobs, that all too often determines their movement and leaves 25 percent of them without regular work. Cities grow beyond the 3 million mark

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while under 10 percent of the workforce are in industry - an almost exact reversal of the normal 19th Century pattern and a reversal which spells unrelieved pressure and continuing and desperate poverty for a majority of the new urban dwellers.

Add the fact that over 40 million migrants could leave Europe for the New World in the 19th Century while, today, the largest "wandering of the peoples" in history is taking place within the nations internally, from rural destitution to urban poverty all inside the same developing land and we can add up a picture which, while in its broad outlines resembles the earlier experience of now developed societies when they heaved themselves into the industrial urban order, in every case offers greater obstacles, greater difficulties, greater incoherences, blockages and dangers than any of the nations, now developed and urbanized, ever experienced in their own transition. We are seeing the same process - yes. But it is taking place in a wholly new context of misfortune and hair-raising risk.

So, perhaps the differences are too great for the past to be relevant. Perhaps we have nothing to learn, no guidance to receive, no hints for hope and survival. But since we have nowhere else to look, let us struggle all the same with the angel of history and try to find some answers in past human behaviour and past human experience to the fearful dilemmas of our own day.

We must begin by accepting the element of chance and luck in history. Those of us who are rich, white, developed and barely post-imperialist must be specially careful to recognise that the people of European stock and their descendents - Anglo-Saxons, Iberians, Teutons, Franks, Slavs - by conquest and settlement took over all the best land in the planet in the last four hundred years and this vast takeover, which they still command, enormously cushioned their transition to the industrial economy. To give one example - but the most critical - the opening up of the world's temperate grain lands by European settlers flooded the late 19th Century system with cheap food. And this colossal defeat of the old eternal energy of mankind - malnutrition and recurrent local famine - coupled with the accompanying sanitary revolution of clean water and reliable drains, proved a point about human development whose importance it is hard to over-estimate. Steady food and clean water began to end

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the horrible levels of infantile mortality in the earlier cities and as parents came to see their first three children survive, they began to doubt the need to have ten more as insurance for their old age. By the end of the 19th Century, in developed lands, Thomas Malthus had been proved wrong. Population does not necessarily rise to consume the resources made available to it. At a certain level of nutrition, security, income and - one should add - literacy and opportunity, family size begins to stabilize.

But we should notice more than the good fortune of abundant harvests in all this. The other critical element - clean water and the heroic achievements of late Victorian society in sanitation and sewage - were not acts of fortune, like occupying empty, supremely fertile farm land. They were acts of policy. And here we have a lot to learn from our forefathers about effective or disastrous routes in the urban order. Do not think that the sanitary revolution, the beginnings of housing for the poor, the introduction of universal education, the beginnings of social insurance and a concern for unemployment came in on a great tide of popular approval. They had to be fought for step by step by a coalition of generous-minded reformers among the fortunate and of tough, hard bargaining leaders among the increasingly self-conscious and impatient poor. The Disraeli who defined Britain in terms of a total division based on wealth and poverty was also the Disraeli who saw the implications of extending the franchise to all adult males (of course) and who called one of his chief aims "sanitas, sanitas, omne sanitatum" and introduced the first housing acts. His was the type of genius of conservative leadership that simply saw the gap between fortune and misery would tear society apart unless the fortunate themselves were prepared for the transfer of resources and the openness for reform needed to lessen the gap and create a social order in which every citizen had some share. True, in Britain, it was a old aspiration. The cry of Cromwell's man, John Lilburne, "the poorest he that is in England hath a right to live as the richest he" went on echoing through generous hearts and consciences and ensured that, at every turning point of strain and storm, there was enough sense of justice and compassion among the fortunate to maintain the momentum of essential reform.

But at the same time, the pressures increased from the side of the poor and exploited. With literacy, with growing trade union organization, later with the vote and the growth of every variant of socialism and social democracy, the

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determination of three-quarters of the citizens to have a greater share in the wealth their labours helped to produce, began in the late 19th Century to push society towards a rather less skewed and indefensible distribution of rewards - and the pressures have continued ever since. In fact, we can come here to something of an historical conclusion. Where the conjunction of a far-sighted sense of justice among the fortunate and urgent pressure for fairer shares among the mass of the people have produced a steadily maintained movement of reform, a readiness to reconsider institutional blockages, an ability to sit down together and argue about the realities of daily bread and about the rights of the "poorest he", then that society, with all its difficulties and disturbances, has made not too painful and violent a transition to the new industrial urban order. Where these have been lacking, there has been social convulsion, violent revolution and an impetus to merciless world-wide war and conquest. A period which includes two world wars, ever-renewed depressions and a thousand colonial expeditions can hardly be counted a model of good order. But the states which within this unhappy phase of history contrived to develop freedom, open institutions, greater justice, a more equal citizenship and minds open to the ever renewed need for further reform were those where the dialogue of fortunate and miserable, of elite and masses, of rich and poor led not to deadly confrontation and breakdown but to a progressive search for better answers, better policies and better results.

Let us apply this analogy to our present phase of world development. What we have now is to adopt Disraeli's analogy, we have "two planets - a planet of the rich and the planet of the poor" and I would suggest that, among all the priorities that we have to consider in a Conference that includes all of human life and hope - or despair and violence - the three priorities that determined peace or revolt in the 19th Century are those which should occupy us now.

The first is not so much a program as an attitude - to achieve a balance of openness and generosity among the fortunate and of pressure and realism among the vast majority who are not. Here, at Habitat, let this be the mood in all the debates and all the discussions. Hard liners, gross misunderstandings, closed minds, closed hearts - that is the route to planetary disaster here or in any other international conference.

The second is a concrete strategy. We cannot reinvent the good fortune of 19th

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Century food supplies. The world of a billion has grown to four billion. The temperate lands are all ploughed up. The entire grain reserve is in the hands of the fortunate North Americans and for their food, the poorer lands paid 11 billion dollars more between 1973 and 1975. This, coupled with rising energy prices, threatens to cripple the economies of the poorest peoples. Worse still, it threatens them with famine. But let us use our cooperation and inventiveness to make good with hard thought, hard work and hard resources the fabulous good luck of earlier days. Let a high priority of Habitat be to send to the meeting of the World Food Council which immediately follows this conference a double message - support for the Rome Food Conference's aim of $25-30 billion a year invested in Third World agriculture, of which $5 billion should come from the old rich of the industrialized world and the new rich of the oil fields. So far, about a billion of this external commitment is firmly pledged. Let us move along to the full sum required.

Within Habitat itself, let us look at the overwhelming need to give farming the infrastructure of settlements - the intermediate markets, agro-industries, market roads, regional urban centers - without which the aim of an annual 5 percent increase in developing farm output will simply not take place. If we can together give Third World agriculture the stimulus it needs - and this requires a national policy for regional and local distribution of population, settlements, investment and opportunity - then we can, as it were, invent by good planning the equivalent of the good luck which fell into the laps of the 19th Century settlers. And in doing so, we can banish that dark cloud of the risk of famine hanging over the world and at the same time begin to ensure the survival of children and hence the stabilization of family size.

And this agricultural strategy can help to lessen the lemming-like surges of peasant to city which threatens to overwhelm even the bravest urban plans. With world population possibly doubling to nearly 7 billion by the year 2000, with nearly half still on the land in developing countries, there is a vast overhang waiting to be dislodged at the least disturbance - soil eroding, monsoons failing mechanization pushing ahead. The first need in taking the strain off cities is not to allow the megalopolises to grow still further but build up the intermediate centers - as in France or Rumania or China - which both save a flourishing farming system and provide other outlets for urban movement.

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And now for the third priority, within the settlements themselves, let us begin and carry through the nineteenth century reforms of urban sanitation, public housing, education and communal services. There are, of course, a thousand other needs. Water and sewage plans cannot be carried out without control of landuse, an end of land speculation, securing the unearned increment for community investment and planning and siting cities in such a way that they can be clean, healthy and safe. But since priorities there must be, let them be sanitation and clean water. The World Bank has published the outline of a package for basic infrastructure in settlements - sites and services, self-help housing, urban public transport, health services, clean water. The whole program is about $30 billion a year, the share of water $3 billion. If this plan could be adopted, the world in every sense would be a sweeter place.

But here, I fear, we hear the voices of the selfish rich exclaiming that no such thing is possible. The developed world, they say, is in such disarray, in such danger of inflation, in such precarious economic health that transfers of this sort are inconceivable. We have just been told at UNCTAD by a responsible Western government that $6 billions for commodity agreements might restart inflation among the wealthy. I confess my answer here, in the immortal phrase of Morecombe and Wise, is simply "rubbish"! The developed world is inflated because it systematically tries to take out more than it puts in. Take two chief examples. The first is waste. We operate our electricity systems at about 35 percent capacity. We have private transport systems which waste up to 40 percent of the petroleum they use. We have a B1 bomber which in a year uses the equivalent of all America's buses. We build 80 storey ziggurats which need simultaneous heating and cooling. We stock invaluable organic wastes to pollute our water courses. We throw away billions of cans and bottles and buy new ones manufactured at higher cost in energy. On a sober calculus, North America could save 50 percent of the energy it buys and still achieve much the same standard of living. The whole program for agricultural development and urban renewal could be financed either from what we waste or by a cut of, say, a third in our consumption of alcohol.

The second appalling desperate and continuous cause of inflation is our arms spending. Since 1973 it has increased by $60 billions a year. It now tops $300 billions. Since no goods are made by arms industries to mop up the wages

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they create, arms spending is by definition the most inflationary of all expenditure. And what do we get? The ability to blow up the planet twenty times over? Once is enough. Plutonium bombs which can give the whole world cancer? Plutonium wastes that after twenty years are beginning to burst their containers on the oceanbeds to release poisons with a half life of 25,000 years? Just how rational can we be? We spend $300 billions on the weapons of death, we boggle at $30 billions for the means of life.

But is there a hope here? The disproportions have become so tragi-comic that perhaps here at Habitat a stand can be made and a reversal begun. Three years ago, the Soviet Union proposed and the U.N. General Assembly approved a proposal to cut arms spending by 10 percent and devote a little of it - only 10 percent, alas - to development. The resolution stands but nothing, nothing at all, has been done about it. Why not then propose that arms spending, the prime source of world inflation, be now cut by 10 percent and the $30 billions devoted to basic agricultural and urban development? The mechanics of the process can be worked out. What is needed now is the commitment and the funds. And if it is not possible to change the original Resolution 3093 (XXVII) from the 2194th Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, 7th December 1973 (in case anyone, including the Soviet delegates, are interested), could we not stick at least to the 10 percent of the 10 percent which gives us just what we need for safe world water supplies in every settlement - $3 billions a year for ten years. With it could come good health, surviving babies, stabilizing families and a vast increase in human dignity and human happiness. In fact it may well be the fastest, surest route we have to a planet beginning to grow away from enmity and death and look towards the works of life.

It is simply not possible to underline sufficiently the appalling state of our collective imagination when $300 billions for arms seems normal and $3 billions for water exceptional. But Habitat can perhaps show that the beginning of a vast reversal of values is taking place. The city of man is turning its face against the image of necropolis. The model of sure and shared supplies of food and water, of the extension of literacy and health and justice to all the poeple is the model we have to learn from the first phase of the technological order. Can we in the turmoils ahead, show that as a small species on our fragile planet we can collectively "choose life" and by that creative process of generosity among

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the fortunate elites and determined pressure from the mass of the people, build an order in our settlements which gives us some reasonable hope of living in peace ourselves and leaving a peaceful planet to our children? We shall not get it by chance or luck. We shall not secure it by the present divisions and conflicts of "our proud and angry dust". But we could begin to build it by working to make decent settlements our first priority and giving them the dedication and resources we have too often reserved only for fear and war. If we can begin to accept the priority at Habitat, what a turning point in human destiny this encounter could prove to be! To overcome the vast obstructions of the next decades is indeed "a journey of a thousand days". But let us, here in Vancouver, take the first step."