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STATEMENT BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY H.L. DE SILVA,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SRI LANKA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS**

IN THE SECOND COMMITTEE

OF

THE FIFTIETH U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Agenda Item: 95 B: Human Settlements and 95 C: UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II)

Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations,
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Mr Chairman,

I thank the Secretariat for introductions and the reports submitted under the two Agenda Items in this Cluster under consideration. Please also allow me to associate myself with the statement made by Philippines on behalf of the Group of 77. On the eve of the HABITAT II to be held in Turkey in June 1996, our deliberations on these two items would require a greater degree of attention and focus.

Since the 1976 Vancouver UN Conference on Human Settlements, the issue of providing adequate shelter for all human beings in this Planet appears to have become a core concern of the International Community. Until then the question of human settlements was considered generally within the realm of national responsibilities. There were good reasons for this change of focus. On the one hand, the technological and communication revolution was making the world into a global village. On the other hand, environmental degradation, human rights issues, poverty, unemployment, social disintegration were accompanying homelessness and was creating an urgency to address the issue as a prime national responsibility and a major international concern. Therefore it was natural that the question of human settlement received more transnational attention and become a major international concern. Meanwhile many developing countries, recognizing the importance of provision of housing for its citizens in the context of poverty alleviation programmes, brought this issue to the fore in their national development Agendas. In my country nearly two decades of concerted action has been taken to alleviate homelessness and to improve quality of housing under a separate Government Ministry and Departments set up specifically for this purpose. We have made significant strides in providing shelter for our people, primarily for the poor through various programmes. While most efforts in this field have been undertaken through Govt. Agencies, we have also encouraged the private sector and non-governmental participation in the strategy and endeavours on provision of shelter, and enhancing quality of housing and living standards. This strategy has enabled the Govt. to foster people's participation through self-help schemes drawing upon indigenous capabilities while minimising the dependence on State patronage for provision of resources. We have recognised the importance of providing adequate housing for our people as an important element to mitigate affects

of poverty and other allied social problems. While we value international cooperation and expertise in this sphere we have successfully employed indigenous solutions to eradicate homelessness and allied problems. The contribution made by the Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) in this regard is being widely appreciated in Sri Lanka.

At a time when almost all countries in the World embrace new economic policies based on liberalisation, encourage growth through the private sector and adopt increased industrialisation as strategies to enhance the quality of life of its people, rapid urbanisation of the population has become a reality. This unmitigated migration in to cities within nations and sometimes across national boundaries pose a formidable array of problems for most countries. In recent times, we observe that resort to terrorism and irregular immigration and emigration patterns emerging as a by-product of a social and economic crises affecting by and large metropolitan areas of most cities in the world. In this context, the theme of the HABITAT II as a "Conference on cities" appear most appropriate. We thank the Government of Turkey for hosting this Conference. We believe the deliberations and the outcome of the Conference in Istanbul will draw important conclusions highlighting problems as well as solutions to enable the national governments and the international community to have a more holistic approach to issues on provision of shelter and improving the quality of living conditions. We also note with satisfaction that the HABITAT II will address two themes of global importance, "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanising world". We are convinced that sustainable development is a crucial element to create socially, economically and environmentally sound human settlements.

HABITAT II is taking place in the back drop of several UN sponsored global conferences of the past two decades which drew attention to continuing and emerging social and environmental problems which surfaced primarily due to excesses of the 20th Century. In the first half of this decade we have seen several Summits and major international conferences on social and environmental issues commencing with UNCED in Rio in 1992 and on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995.

Women and Development in Beijing in 1995. As a manifestation of the desire to encourage this trend to develop global multi-faceted strategies to tackle these issues in an interdependent, world it is our view that the international community should provide adequate attention and focus on the forthcoming HABITAT II and facilitate participation at the Conference at the highest possible level. For this purpose, it is imperative that we provide adequate support and assistance to the HABITAT Conference Secretariat and take appropriate decisions in this Committee and GA with a view to convening a successful HABITAT II for the benefit of all.