

**The Forum on Human Solidarity
Presented at the Hearings in Committee II
June 11, 1996**

On Saturday, June 8, 1996, the Secretary-General of Habitat II, Dr. Wally N'Dow, convened the first United Nations Forum on Human Solidarity - a spontaneous conversation by a group of the world's leading thinkers about the capacity of the human spirit to cope with rapid global urbanization and its terrifying implications.

The Habitat II Forum on Human Solidarity stressed that progress toward more livable and humane cities requires going beyond a "bricks and mortar" response. Better housing and improved infrastructure are essential - but the civic disengagement and social malaise that eat at the heart of cities will not disappear unless urban problems are viewed through a prism of human values and resolved through a strong sense of human solidarity.

What is Human Solidarity? Forum members identified these critical elements:

- civic leadership based on ethics, spiritual values, and the political will to anticipate and respond to change - leadership that has, for the most part, disappeared today.
- spiritual courage to choose sustainable urbanization over mere convenience or greed.
- shared values of community based on mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance.
- social trust that enables people of divergent cultures and customs to live in harmony.
- civic pride and political morality that give cities their intrinsic value.
- cooperation based on common responsibilities, interests, attitudes, and goals.
- common aspirations for a better quality of life and a sustainable natural environment.
- solidarity builds community and - given the raw fury of the urban population explosion - may ultimately be our urban planet's only salvation.

During six hours of discussions, including comments from an audience of more than 600 at the historic Ciragan Palace in Istanbul, Forum members agreed to a basic underlying premise:

Human solidarity must address social, economic, and political inequality - within countries, between countries, and between the North and South. The goal of building tolerant communities and making cities more humane cannot be achieved unless people are empowered to improve their own environment and life chances. Cities must respect diversity and strive for a social and economic mosaic, not just a "melting pot."

The first session of the Forum focused on the elements of human solidarity and its potential as the bedrock of healthy human settlements. The second session highlighted a more difficult and pragmatic notion - a global code of behavior for city dwellers, governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

Responding to Dr. N'Dow's initial charge, Forum participants called for development of global guidelines that take into account the broader spatial and thought dimensions of tomorrow's cities and provide the foundation for a new global social contract to improve human settlements as envisioned by Habitat II.

Forum participants set forth seven Guidelines for a Sustainable Urban Planet Through Human Solidarity:

I. Children's special needs for healthy physical, social, and psychological development must be a priority. Particular attention should go to the unique needs of street children. The well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a sustainable urban environment.

II. The concept of "a wonderful city but a terrible place to live" is unacceptable. Without ready access to jobs, potable water, clean air, adequate food, medical care, and responsible civic governance, there will be no peace.

III. Local governance has to emerge from a community's own values and practices. The Western world's sophisticated concepts of democracy cannot be imposed on every community. What matters is a viable, accountable, responsible local governance.

IV. Education at all levels, with emphasis on equal access for women, should be an overriding political commitment. Conflict resolution can be taught as part of a school curriculum so that the next generation can learn to negotiate among contrasting world views instead of using confrontation to resolve differences.

V. Society's most vulnerable members - the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and those who are marginalized - must receive special attention.

VI. Cities can be made to work, no matter how large their size. Economic growth does not automatically mean pollution or decay. Priorities should include public transportation to link neighborhoods and jobs; basic services to the poor to enable them to transform blight and slums; and tackling key health-related environmental issues.

VII. Cities must generate social equity, including equal access to opportunities. Public consultation will allow all voices to be heard in an open forum, helping to assure increased citizen confidence, informed decisions, and consensus based on broad support.

There was strong agreement among all participants and the large audience that the Forum on Human Solidarity launched at Habitat II should continue - including regular "spontaneous conversations" by world leaders at significant venues, regionally and globally. The full report of the Habitat II Forum on Human Solidarity will be published soon and broadly disseminated.

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PARTICIPANTS
HUMAN SOLIDARITY FORUM
CIRAGAN PALACE, ISTANBUL
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Dr. Ruth Cardoso
Brazil's First Lady
Brasilia, Brazil

Mr. Charles Correa
Eminent architect/planner
Bombay, India

Dr. Ihsan Dogramaci
President
Bilkent University
Ankara, Turkey

Mr. Millard Fuller
President
Habitat for Humanity International
Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Dr. Farkhonda Hassan
Member of Parliament
Cairo, Egypt

Hon. Teddy Kollek
Former Mayor of Jerusalem
Jerusalem, Israel

Dr. Benjamin Ladner
President, American University
Washington DC, USA

Dr. Phyllis Lambert
Canadian Center for Architecture
Montreal, Canada

Dr. Federico Mayor
Director General, UNESCO
Paris, France

Hon. Billie Miller
Deputy Prime Minister
Bridgetown, Barbados

Dean James Morton
Dean, St. John the Divine
New York, NY, USA

Mr. Nat Nuno-Amarteifio
Mayor of Accra
Accra, Ghana

Dr. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
Eminent historian
New York, NY, USA

Dr. Ismail Serageldin
Vice-President
The World Bank
Washington DC, USA

Dr. Rajesh Tandon
Participatory Research Society in Asia
Delhi, India

Mrs. Gorel Thurdin
Deputy Speaker
Swedish Parliament
Stockholm, Sweden