



# HABITAT II



TO BE CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY

AGENDA ITEM 95 (b):

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

AND

AGENDA ITEM 95 (c):

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)

STATEMENT

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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN  
SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)

TO THE

SECOND COMMITTEE  
AT THE 50TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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**Statement by Dr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General  
United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and  
Secretary-General United Nations Conference on  
Human Settlements (Habitat II)  
to the Second Committee  
at the 50th Session of the General Assembly  
United Nations, New York, 14 November 1995**

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me even at this late stage of the Committee's proceedings to convey to you and to your distinguished colleagues on the Bureau my warm congratulations on your well-deserved election. The efficient and able manner in which you are conducting the Committee's business amply bears out the wisdom of that choice.

Distinguished Delegates, I appear before you today in a dual capacity, and my task, therefore, is to introduce for your consideration two agenda items, one on human settlements [item 97 (b)], and the second on the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) [item 95 (c)]. Let me begin by drawing your attention to the documents before the Committee: under agenda item 95 (b), the Report of the Commission on Human Settlements on the work of its fifteenth session (A/50/8) and the Report of the Commission on Human Settlements on the Implementation of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (A/50/8/Add I); and under agenda item 95(c), the Report of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) on the work of its second substantive session (A/50/37), the Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Resolution 49/109 (A/50/519), and the Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the regional commissions on the preparations for the Conference at the regional level (A/50/411).

Mr. Chairman, as the century draws to a close, the focus and content of international and national development strategies are coming under close re-examination. This is not because there is any radical difference today in the basic issues these strategies are designed to address: peace, economic growth, environmental protection, poverty reduction and human rights continue to be fundamental objectives of the international community. What is

different is the context in which these objectives have to be achieved.

The changing global political, economic and social environment is in part the result of unforeseen and transcendental shifts that, literally, have redrawn the political map of the world. I refer, of course, to the end of the cold war and the withering away of those ideological divides that for five decades played a dominant role in setting the parameters for the work of the United Nations, including much of what was done in the field of social and economic development.

In great part this changing global environment is the result of secular trends long in the making, trends whose full impact is being felt only now and that will continue to condition development policy for decades to come. In effect, the "rules of the game" are being rewritten, and all of us, whether in national governments or in multilateral organizations, will be obliged to adjust our strategies and our work accordingly to meet the needs of a world transformed. But transformed not by violent and catastrophic global conflict, as was the case in 1946, when this institution was born, but by a gradual, subtle process spanning decades. Clearly, a new world is in the making, but this new world will not be a true community of nations unless we all share in the benefits of the emerging global economy. It will not be stable if we ignore the hopes and aspirations for work and a better life of the growing numbers of the poor, caught as they are in a void between past and present, between the promise of prosperity and the reality of their poverty. And it will not be sustainable if we continue unrestrained consumption practices that ignore the fragility of the planet's ecosystem and its finite natural resource base.

Mr. Chairman, confronting both the challenge posed by this transformation and the resulting changes in the political and economic rules of the game will not be easy for institutions and organizations set in their ways. Nor will it be without pain for national governments or, for that matter, for the United Nations. Nevertheless, it is a challenge we must all face, one that I believe can help give a new sense of direction and purpose to the United Nations. For in an integrated world, a world tied together in every facet of its existence, there can be only global solutions to global problems: whether it is nuclear disarmament, the environment, poverty, unemployment, monetary and economic policy, or the multitude of other related issues now testing our sense of purpose and ingenuity. All require cooperative solutions within an international framework to help give them form and substance.

Notwithstanding a few bright lights in places such as East and Southeast Asia, the numbers living in absolute poverty already encompass one-fourth of humanity. Our enthusiasm with

emerging financial markets and the latest breakthroughs in information technologies should not blind us to the fact that today more than one billion people, most of them women and children, are homeless or trapped in dehumanizing slums and squatter settlements, lacking clean water to drink or elementary sanitation or health care, without jobs that pay a living wage. For them, our changing world has meant a drastic lowering of expectations about what the future holds in store. Sadly, all too many have no expectations at all. And nowhere is the situation more desperate than in the poorest countries.

Reaching out and giving a hand to the poorest countries, indeed, to the poor within all countries, as well as assisting governments to manage this transformation successfully, must remain the highest priority for the United Nations system as a whole. No other organization has the skill, experience and global reach to do so. But this requires practical programmes that enable people to feed themselves, to improve their shelter, to build livelihoods and new income-earning opportunities, to provide for infrastructure, services, basic education and health care, to build human and technical capacity at all levels -- be it in city halls, in national governments or in the private and community sectors. In short, our highest priority is to strengthen human security, to develop human potential, to build hope.

Mr. Chairman this must be our agenda. For in our post-cold war world, the threats to peace, stability and human welfare are less nuclear and ideological than they are economic and social -- hopelessness, hunger, poverty, and the failure to safeguard the human habitat. Building an economic, social and ecological foundation for peace, therefore, should and must be the most urgent and fundamental task of the international community. Otherwise the North-South divide, the growing gap between rich and poor, may well be an even greater barrier to a peaceful world in the 21st century than the East-West conflict was in the 20th.

The revolution in telecommunications technology today sends ideas around the world in the time it takes to switch on a light. It may have turned the world into the global village envisaged by Barbara Ward, but it has also made us aware -- at times painfully so -- of how our neighbours and others live, feeding a growing impatience on the parts of hundreds of millions for a better life. Not tomorrow, but today. All of us -- intergovernmental organizations, national governments, local governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the media, the academic and scientific community -- are responsible for raising the expectations of the poor. It is our collective responsibility, to do what we can do now to help realize these hopes, and that responsibility must guide our deliberations when the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II --

or the City Summit as Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has called it -- convenes in Istanbul next June.

For it is in human settlements where this better life and livelihoods will have to be created.

Mr. Chairman, if we are now in the midst of what has been called a period of "civilizational change", it is a change that is relentlessly moving us in the direction of the urban world, one that will come into being not long after the 21st century dawns. Then, most of humanity will live and work in cities and towns large and small. It is there where most economic growth will have to be generated and jobs found, where the most housing and services will be needed, where most natural resources will be consumed, where the need for environmental safeguards and management to ensure both human health and sustainable development will be most critical.

Cities and towns, therefore, cannot be denied the central places they must occupy in the economic and development policies of the international community and national governments and in the investment strategies of the private sector. You know the raw statistics, so I will not repeat them here. But the cities and towns that these statistics will turn into tomorrow will be the vast stage on which the numerous agents of change covering the multitude of institutions and networks of civil societies will play out their various political, economic and social agendas. They will be the arena in which the scourge of poverty, hunger, joblessness, disease and the social ills to which they give rise -- crime, violence, drug abuse -- will have to be vanquished. And even as we adjust to the demands of this new urban world, we can do no less for the multitudes still living in the human settlements of the rural world. The drama may now be in the city, but their needs -- their hopes -- are equally our concern.

For all these reasons, Distinguished Delegates, human settlements development has become a priority challenge for the international community and the United Nations, as Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali has so correctly pointed out. It is why it is so appropriate that Istanbul winds up the remarkable continuum of United Nations conferences that began in Rio, a continuum that even now is both rewriting the economic and social development agenda of the international community for the 21st century and providing us with a more holistic, more humane message about our global problems and the solutions they require.

Simply put, Mr. Chairman, Habitat II will seek to ease a transition -- a painful transition -- that has still to run its course. It will do so, briefly, by:

- Formulating guidelines for global and national policies;
- Reaching agreement on practical programmes to ensure that our cities and towns -- human settlements of all sizes -- are productive, healthy, safe, just, sustainable;
- Developing new partnerships at the global, national and local levels between the public and private sectors for human settlements development compatible with a changing world.

 Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, I am greatly encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the Habitat II Conference, and its goals. The preparatory process is now moving forward with 134 countries engaged in national preparatory activities and in initiatives involving all sectors of society and people from all walks of life. Let me mention just a few:

The "Best Practices" Initiative for Improving the Living Environment, a key component of our preparatory work for Istanbul, has captured the imagination of the entire world. To date, more than 100 countries have submitted reports on the original and innovative and successful, projects and programmes that they initiated in more than 280 cities, communities and neighborhoods, and we anticipate receiving many more before we reach Istanbul.

For example, thirty-five countries have organized, or are in the process of organizing, national competitions and exhibitions on "Best Practices" in sustainable human settlements development and management. Moreover, a regional competition is underway in Latin America, and other initiatives are even now being organized.

The "Best Practices" initiative forms a part of an unprecedented global effort to identify solutions that work. They represent a wealth of experience, original ideas and ways of dealing with some of the most pressing problems human settlements face today, and they will play an important role in the plan of action that will emerge from Istanbul in June. We believe we owe it to the world to disseminate these experiences and initiatives so as to improve the quality of life of people everywhere; that is why we envisage the creation of a global Data Bank, or Observatory of "Best Practices", to which central and local governments, as well as the corporate and community sectors, can turn as they search for solutions to the problems that confront them. In short, we do not want to go to Istanbul to bemoan the situation; we want to go there to do something concrete about it, something that will attract the creative capital to be found in rich and poor nation alike.

Because of the importance we attach to this "Best Practices" initiatives, I am particularly pleased to report to you that next week -- from 19-22 November -- the Municipality of Dubai in the United Emirates will sponsor an International Conference on "Best Practices." I consider it one of the most important stops on the road to Istanbul, and we are indebted to the Municipality of Dubai for all that it has done, and is doing, to ensure its success.

In addition to the Dubai Conference, a series of more than 100 workshops -- some already held, others to take place in the months between now and Istanbul -- will provide valuable input to the global preparatory process and the programmes of Habitat II. They cover a range of issues from new technical solutions for urban transport and water supply to ways and means of reducing urban crime and violence. They have been sponsored by international organizations, governments, local authorities, the private sector, NGOs, community groups, and professional associations.

Prominent among these sponsors have been other agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, and here UNCHS (Habitat), the secretariat for the Istanbul Conference, has been able to benefit from the cross-sectoral partnerships it has set up with many of them. We are very grateful for this support from the UN family, as well as from assistance agencies working with us as we move ahead on the road to Istanbul.

I am also grateful to be able to report to you that preparations for Habitat II are well underway at the regional level. Indeed, I come to you today inspired by a meeting I have just had with President Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg at a conference of African ministers responsible for housing and human settlements. Virtually the entire African continent was represented, an indication of the gravity with which African governments view their human settlements development challenge. The Declaration that was unanimously adopted testifies to the importance they attach to attaining the goals Habitat II has set for itself.

I leave here tomorrow to take part next week in a similar gathering in Santiago, Chile, for the Latin America and Caribbean region. Additional regional meetings already planned include a ministerial conference organized by the Government of Germany, the European Commission and the OECD on the sustainable future of cities, especially in the industrialized countries of the European Union. And already held has been a ministerial conference in Budapest for countries of the region with economies in transition.

All of the meetings and conferences I have cited -- and more are still to come -- are laying the political ground work for the

Habitat II Conference next June. They provide ample evidence that North and South, East and West, the "City Summit" is viewed as critical to the future well being of all countries, that all, rich and poor, have a vested interest in the outcome.

Mr. Chairman, the road to Istanbul has seen the forging of many new alliances and partnerships. Perhaps the most significant is the one that has brought together the Habitat II secretariat and the major international and regional associations of local authorities and their steering committee, popularly known by them as the G4+. Other strong partnerships have been formed with NGOs, community and youth organizations, women's groups and the elderly, the private sector and many, many more, all of them major actors in the human settlements development process.

I should note, too, that the preparation of the Conference's plan of action is well advanced. At the gracious invitation of the French Government -- and I should like to express here my sincere thanks for the hospitality that was extended to us -- an informal inter-sessional drafting group, including representatives of Governments and NGOs from all regions, recently met in Paris. I am pleased to report today that considerable progress was made in drafting a text that we are confident will win wide support.

Meanwhile, in Istanbul itself, preparations are in high gear not only for the Conference, but for the NGO Forum, a Private Sector Forum, an Assembly of Cities and a self-financing Trade Fair that will be among the many features of Habitat II. And I need hardly add that all this would not be possible without the strong and unwavering support of our hosts. I should like to take this opportunity, therefore, to reiterate my appreciation to the Government of Turkey for the depth of its commitment to the Habitat II Conference and to its preparatory process, and I know I speak here for the entire Habitat II secretariat and, indeed, the members of this Committee.

It was against this backdrop of gathering momentum and ever-expanding activities, Mr. Chairman, that the Commission on Human Settlements met for its fifteenth session earlier this year in Nairobi concurrently with the second substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat II. The large turnout for the Commission session and the wide representation it reflected were unprecedented, demonstrating the great interest of Member States, United Nations bodies, local authorities, NGOs and other major groups in the Habitat II preparatory process. Most of the delegates attending the Commission session also attended the Preparatory Committee meeting, a contribution that resulted in a productive interchange and exchange of views that redounded to the benefit of Habitat II and the future human settlements programme of the international community.

enhancing the urban environment. Moreover, they are looking to the Global Plan of Action to elaborate "doable" programmes that can advance and integrate the goals of the other United Nations conferences in the continuum that marks this closing decade of the century. For whether it is social disaffection or the status of women, human rights or population or the environment -- all of them -- all, literally, come home at Habitat II. In Istanbul, therefore, it will be our responsibility, Mr. Chairman, to bring together the various recommendations for action made by the other conferences, especially as they apply to the process of urbanization and to the realization of one of the Conference's prime goals, "Adequate Shelter for All".

It was precisely to advance that goal that the Commission, at the conclusion of its detailed review of progress on the implementation of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, took a number of actions, all subject to endorsement by the General Assembly at this session, including:

- Approval of the Strategy's plan of action for the coming two years;
- Inviting Governments to integrate the review of national shelter strategies, using appropriate indicators, into the preparation of their national plans of action for Habitat II;
- Requesting the Preparatory Committee of the Habitat II Conference to take into account the conclusions of the mid-term review of the Strategy in the Conference's plan of action.

At its concurrent meeting, the Preparatory Committee concentrated on its forthcoming third session, which it recommended be held here at UN headquarters in New York next February -- and on the organization of the work of the Conference and its Rules of Procedure, all requiring action by this General Assembly. In a move fully in keeping with the spirit of the "City Summit", the PrepCom recommended that the General Assembly authorize a special modality to encourage the participation of local authorities in the Habitat II Conference. This modality is introduced under additional Rule 61 of the Rules of Procedures for the Conference, and if the General Assembly approves, local authorities, as the democratically elected representatives of local governments, will be able to take the floor in Istanbul in their own right. They speak for millions upon millions of people in cities, towns and villages of our world. They are the true constituents of Habitat II, and we need to open our doors -- and our minds -- to their intellectual contributions to their hopes, to their aspirations. It is my own hope that the General Assembly will support this recommendation when it comes to a vote.

Assembly will support this recommendation when it comes to a vote.

Mr. Chairman, in turning now to the question of financing, I must tell this Committee that while the Preparatory Committee, expressed satisfaction with the in-cash and in-kind contributions made to the preparatory process and its Trust Funds, it also noted that they were insufficient to support remaining preparatory activities. It called on countries to increase their contributions to the Trust Funds, and it requested the General Assembly to allocate, within existing United Nations resources, sufficient funds to cover key operational tasks of the Conference's ad-hoc secretariat for the period October 1995 - June 1996 and, in general, ensure that Habitat II will be treated adequately with regard to other global United Nations Conferences.

Some significant contributions have been received since the second session of the Preparatory Committee in May, and much progress has been made with the limited resources at the secretariat's disposal. But the fact remains that in-kind and earmarked contributions continue to out pace general in-cash contributions, with funds urgently needed to cover core activities of the secretariat for the remaining eight months, as the preparatory process enters its critical and final phase. Over the past two and a half years, very much has been accomplished with very little in the way of financial resources, a tremendous effort by the secretariat that, I believe, deserves recognition and support. I am confident that they will be forthcoming.

As I have already indicated, Mr. Chairman, since the conclusion of the second session of the Preparatory Committee in May, significant progress has been made on the road to Istanbul. The specific details contained in the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the Implementation of Resolution 49/109 (Document A/50/519) make me optimistic about the outcome of the Habitat II Conference.

My optimism is based both on what we have achieved thus far and on the political support that has been forthcoming from national and local governments and from organizations and people at all levels of society. Istanbul, in short, will be a conference of partnerships -- from local authorities to national leaders, and from every walk of life: the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations, professional organizations and associations, the academic and scientific communities, trade associations, women's groups, coalitions of youth and the elderly, community representatives -- everyone with a stake in the outcome working together in human solidarity. That is our strength.

For North or South -- and there is a little bit of one in the other -- people everywhere face similar problems of poverty, inadequate shelter, inequality, environmental stress, the resurgence of old diseases such as tuberculosis, and new ones such as AIDS. No one country offers a model solution, solutions that must come as we learn from one another, from "Best Practices" and from our common humanity.

In our urbanizing world of the next century, a world history has never known before this, human settlements -- from the smallest hamlet to the largest megacity -- must be at the centre of our concern. And this cannot be done from the outside looking in. It must be done from the inside -- from the neighborhoods of the world -- reaching out. For Habitat is not just about inadequate housing and decaying infrastructure, not just about dangerous streets and environmental neglect and much more. In the final analysis, Habitat II is about attitudes, about leadership, about the willingness of society to meet the needs of humanity, the needs we all share with our neighbours in this "global village" we call home.

For when all is said and done, the future of our human settlements will not be determined by bricks and mortar alone. More housing is needed and rebuilding decaying infrastructure is essential -- the list is long and it must be dealt with. But even then the malaise that now eats at the heart of our cities will not disappear unless we also pay attention to the urban soul. It is human solidarity that transforms the built environment into human -- and humane -- settlements.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, history, geography and social change create the context for human solidarity, rational processes build cities, but faith, loyalty, honour and trust among its members create communal life. That is the goal we seek, and to attain it we need your leadership and help. I am here today to ask for it. We cannot do the job without you.