

Habitat:

United Nations Conference on Human Settlements

Vancouver, 31 May to 11 June 1976

Declaration of Principles

Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda



DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

HABITAT: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements,

Having met from 31 May to 11 June 1976 at Vancouver, Canada,

Aware that the Conference was convened as a result of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly in which the nations of the world expressed their concern over the grave condition of human settlements,

Noting that the quality of life is largely determined by the condition of human settlements, which are the habitat of mankind,

Being deeply concerned with the increasing difficulties facing the world in satisfying basic needs and aspirations of peoples consistent with principles of human dignity,

Recalling the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the World Population Conference, the United Nations World Food Conference, the World Conference of the International Women's Year, the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States and the results of the seventh special session of the General Assembly, and reaffirming the bonds of international solidarity and the will of nations to improve the quality of life for mankind as a whole,

Recognizes that the circumstances of life for vast numbers of people in human settlements are unacceptable and that, unless positive and concrete action is taken at national and international levels to find and implement solutions, these conditions are likely to be further aggravated by a continuation of:

Population growth which will nearly double the numbers of mankind in the next 25 years, thereby more than doubling the need for food, shelter and all other requirements for life and human dignity;

Unbalanced economic development reflected in the wide disparities in wealth which now exist between people and which condemn millions to a life of poverty, often without satisfying the basic necessities of food and shelter;

Rapid unplanned urbanization and consequent conditions of overcrowding, pollution, deterioration and psychological tensions in existing and future metropolitan regions;

Rural dispersion exemplified by small scattered settlements and isolated homesteads which inhibit the provision of infrastructure and services;

Social, ecological and environmental conditions which are exemplified by social segregation, the breakdown of traditional social relationships and cultural values and the increasing degradation of life-supporting resources of air, water and land.

I. PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. These problems pose a formidable challenge to human understanding, imagination, ingenuity and resolve. They demand new priorities to add a qualitative dimension to economic development and a new political commitment which will mobilize the resources necessary to find and implement solutions. Mankind must not be daunted by the scale of the task ahead. The years to come will provide the opportunity to improve the living conditions of all people by:

(a) Adopting bold, meaningful and effective human settlement policies and strategies realistically adapted to local conditions;

(b) Creating more livable, attractive and efficient settlements which recognize human scale and provide social justice for every individual;

(c) Creating possibilities for effective participation by all people in the planning, building and management of human settlements;

(d) Developing innovative approaches in formulating and implementing settlement programmes through more appropriate use of science and technology;

(e) Utilizing unprecedented means of communications for the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of human settlements;

(f) Strengthening bonds of international co-operation, both regionally and globally.

2. In meeting this challenge, human settlements must be seen as an instrument of development. The goals of settlement policies are inseparable from the goals of every sector of social and economic life. The solutions to the problems of human settlements must therefore be conceived as an integral part of the development process of individual nations and the world community.

3. With these opportunities and considerations in mind, and being agreed on the necessity of finding common principles that will guide Governments and the world community in solving the problems of human settlements, the Conference recommends the following general principles and guidelines for action.

II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The foremost goal of human settlement policy is the rapid and continuous improvement in the quality of life of all people, beginning with the satisfaction of the basic needs of food, shelter, employment, health, freedom, dignity and

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opportunity for personal fulfilment without discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, opinion, national or social origin or other cause.

2. In striving to achieve this goal, priority must be given to the needs of the least advantaged people.

3. Economic development should lead to the satisfaction of human needs and is a necessary means towards achieving a better quality of life, provided that it contributes to a more equitable distribution of its benefits.

4. Human dignity and the exercise of free choice consistent with over-all public welfare are basic rights which must be assured in every society. It is therefore the duty of all people to join in the struggle against any form of colonialism, foreign aggression and occupation, domination, apartheid and any other discrimination.

5. Every nation has the right to choose its economic, political and social systems in accordance with the freely expressed will of its people.

6. Taking into account their rights and duties as members of the international community, every nation has the right to exercise sovereignty over its natural resources and economic activities with due regard to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the environment.

7. The environment is the common concern of mankind. All human acts must be guided by a deep respect for the protection of the environmental resources upon which life itself depends. Nations should avoid major and undesirable disturbances of the biosphere and the oceans and should join in the effort to end irresponsible exploitation of all resources which may become either physically exhausted or lose their capacity to regenerate. Special attention should be given to the waste and misuse of resources through war and armaments, with the goal of using the resources thus released to achieve a better quality of life.

8. To achieve universal improvement in the quality of life, there should be a more balanced and equitable structure of economic relations among nations. The achievement of these goals should take into account the principles laid down in the Declaration and Programme of Action of the General Assembly at its sixth special session, the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States and the resolution on development and international economic co-operation adopted by the General Assembly at its seventh special session.

9. The highest priority should be placed on the rehabilitation of homeless people who have been displaced by natural or man-made catastrophes.

10. Women must be fully involved in efforts to improve the quality of life and should have equal opportunity to participate actively in all activities.

III. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

1. It is the responsibility of Governments to establish human settlement policies. Such policies must be an essential component of an over-all development strategy, linking and harmonizing them with policies on industrialization, agriculture, social welfare, and environmental and cultural preservation so that each supports the other in a progressive improvement in human well-being.
2. A human settlement policy must seek harmonious integration or co-ordination of a wide variety of components, including, for example, population growth and distribution, employment, shelter, land use, infrastructure and services. Governments must create mechanisms and institutions to develop and implement such policy.
3. The demographic characteristics of many countries require policies on growth and distribution of population in order to orient rural-urban migration, to ensure orderly processes of urbanization and to minimize rural dispersion with the ultimate goal of achieving balanced development.
4. Human settlement policies and programmes should define and strive for minimum standards for an acceptable quality of life. These standards will vary within and between countries, as well as over periods of time, and therefore must be subject to change in accordance with conditions and possibilities. Some standards are most appropriately defined in quantitative terms, thus providing precisely defined targets. Others must be qualitative, with their achievement subject to felt need. At the same time, social justice and a fair sharing of resources demand the discouragement of excessive consumption.
5. Adequate shelter and services are a basic human right which places an obligation on Governments to ensure their attainment by all people, beginning with direct assistance to the least advantaged through guided programmes of self-help and community action. Governments should endeavour to remove all impediments hindering attainment of these goals. Of special importance is the elimination of social and racial segregation.
6. Health is an essential element in the development of the individual and one of the goals of human settlement policies should be to improve environmental health conditions and basic health services.
7. Basic to human dignity is the right of people, individually and collectively, to participate directly in shaping the policies and programmes affecting their lives. The process of choosing and carrying out a given course of action for human settlement improvement should be designed expressly to fulfil that right. Effective human settlement policies require a continuous co-operative relationship between a Government and its people.
8. The most effective use possible must be made of all human resources, both

skilled and unskilled. Technologies that maximize productive employment and are appropriate to local conditions must be encouraged and people should be trained in their use.

9. Land is an essential element in the development of both urban and rural settlements. Because of its limited supply, the use and tenure of land should be subject to public control through appropriate legislation. The value added to land by public decision and investment should be recaptured for the benefit of society as a whole. Governments should also ensure that prime agricultural land is not diverted indiscriminately from its most vital use.

10. Human settlements are characterized by significant disparities in living standards and opportunities. Harmonious development of human settlements requires the reduction of disparities between rural and urban areas, between regions and within urban areas themselves. Governments should adopt policies which aim at decreasing the differences between living standards and opportunities in urban and non-urban areas.

11. A human settlement is more than a grouping of people, shelter and work places. Diversity in the characteristics of human settlements reflecting cultural and aesthetic values must be respected and encouraged and areas of historical religious or archaeological importance preserved for posterity.

12. The world's accumulated knowledge and experience in human settlements must be available to all. Governments and the international community should facilitate the transfer of relevant technology and experience and should encourage and assist the creation of endogenous technology, particularly for the benefit of developing countries.

13. In the planning and management of human settlements, Governments should take into consideration all pertinent recommendations of previous United Nations conferences dealing with the quality of life, starting with the high priority given to the environmental impact of human settlements (Stockholm), the housing and sanitary ramifications of population growth (Bucharest), rural development and the need to increase food supply (Rome), and the effect on women of housing and urban development (Mexico City).

14. The international community must constantly refer to these principles and, at the same time, seek new and more effective ways to support the self-reliant development of those societies that are struggling to meet the human settlement challenges facing them.
