



UNITED NATIONS



Habitat:

**United Nations Conference on Human Settlements
Vancouver, Canada, 31 May-11 June 1976**

**Press Release HE/V/8
30 May 1976**

CAUTION: ADVANCE TEXT

Hold until delivery at 11:30 hours PDT,
Monday, 31 May 1976.

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY BARNEY DANSON, PRESIDENT OF HABITAT

At the Opening of the Habitat Conference, 31 May 1976

I am grateful to this distinguished assembly for the honour you have given me and my country. I assure you I will do my utmost to warrant your confidence.

I know that I speak for all of you in paying tribute to the dynamic leadership of the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Enrique Penalosa, and his small but very effective staff. They have guided the preparations for this conference with great dedication and wisdom. Their commitment to the betterment of human settlement on this planet is an example for us all.

I know that I speak for all of you as well in expressing our appreciation for the work of the Preparatory Committee. Under the wise and able chairmanship of Father George Muhoho of Kenya, it provided invaluable assistance and advice to the Secretary-General.

As your President, I would also like to thank each nation here represented for its assistance in preparing for Habitat. The films, slides and other excellent presentations which each delegation has brought to Vancouver are vital tools with which we can work to accomplish the tasks before us.

As President of Habitat, this Conference on Human Settlements, I will do everything I can to ensure the success of the global effort all of you have invested in the preparations for this moment.

During the next two weeks, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate that a United Nations conference can transcend political and ideological differences, to alleviate problems still unnecessarily afflicting the human condition.

The ideals in the documents we have before us are high and the aspirations are long-range, yet we must be realistic in choosing as our priorities, problems which are urgent now and have the greatest impact on the greatest numbers of people. We must emphasize the most readily achievable solutions to these problems, if we are to keep faith with those who look to Habitat to bring a greater degree of dignity to their existence.

We cannot resolve all of the world's problems here in Vancouver between now and the eleventh of June. We should respect the competence and responsibility of other United Nations' organs, in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council, which are already seized of some of these important and difficult problems.

What we undoubtedly can accomplish at Habitat, if we set our minds determinedly to this goal, is agreement on essential but achievable objectives that can give new hope to those most in need on this planet.

Habitat will be successful only if it is a conference of commitment, whatever may be our respective ideologies.

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We know that those whose lack of opportunity still threatens their very physical survival comprise the most fundamental issue of human settlements. We also know that the ultimate reason why such a lack of advantage still exists is not lack of resources to eliminate it, but a lack of political will.

As Barbara Ward has so rightly said (in "The Home of Man"): "The world's poor increasingly know that their condition is not an act of God but the choice of man."

We have an opportunity here to change that choice. This, to me, is what we mean when we speak of Habitat as being a solution-oriented conference.

Before I lapse into the judicial objectivity required of a chairman, I would like to express this hope for Habitat: let us try to ensure that Habitat is the beginning of the process to end that degree of deprivation which threatens individual existence itself. Let us, in a full spirit of cooperation, agree on a program that can achieve this objective in the shortest possible time.

I am told that I am not expected to be politically neutral but that, as your Chairman, I must be procedurally objective.

With over 170 nations and observer groups expected to participate, your Chairman will naturally be preoccupied constantly by the best use to be made of the very limited time at our disposal, by the integrity and credibility of our proceedings, and by the realization of our objectives.

(more)

In making procedural judgements and rulings, I shall be guided essentially by the mandate which the conference has received from the General Assembly, the preservation of the effectiveness of the conference, and the pursuit of its successful conclusion. These are the basic criteria by which the relevance of our labours will be judged in the end. In discharging the demanding assignment with which you have entrusted me, I know that I can count on your full cooperation and understanding.

In order that each delegation has the opportunity for equal contribution, I am sure that you would wish all interventions to respect the time limits necessary to permit this. You will be asked this afternoon to approve these limits, along with a signal system bringing the assistance of technology to the Chairman's responsibility for enforcing equality of intervention opportunity. In this I shall try to be as diligent and fair as I possibly can.

There are those in the world who, while not represented here, have expressed deep cynicism about the ability of world bodies to come to grips with real problems of human concern. We have an opportunity not only to reduce or remove that cynicism, but to elevate international meetings like this to conclaves of hope, inspiration, education and essential political action which will strengthen the United Nations as well as improve the living circumstances of the human family.

Indeed, the success of this conference, in areas where success is not only possible but essential, can provide nations and their peoples with a better understanding of one another that can only enhance the opportunities for agreement in other areas.

It is thus my hope that you will extend your cooperation and support in dealing diligently with the compelling problems which are now before us.

We can deal with them successfully at Habitat by dealing with one another with respect and dignity. We can best help humanity achieve its full potential by handling the solvable problems of the present with a sense of urgency and commitment.

If we address ourselves single-mindedly to the fundamental issues before this conference, the human family to whom we are all ultimately responsible will look upon Habitat as a new beginning, as the point in time where the world began to regain faith in our institutions, and where belief in humanity's capacity to achieve its highest potential was renewed.

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