



HABITAT II



NOTE TO CORRESPONDENTS

Statement by Dr. Wally N'Dow
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)
on the Financing of the Conference
12 February 1996

It has been known from the beginning that in the absence of resources, no conference preparatory activities could take place. Yet, with only two years to go -- half the normal preparatory time for such global conferences -- it was also clear we could not afford to wait the one year or so normally required for such resources to start coming in. It was under these circumstances that we advanced some available Foundation resources to be used for the conference preparations.

We did this very openly and very transparently. All concerned knew about it, including the donors. What I cannot emphasize too strongly is that everything has been done in strict conformity with the applicable United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations. Moreover, a full report was made to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), which took note of it and encouraged us to look for resources to pay back what we had borrowed. And this is what we have been doing. So far we have paid back US\$500,000, and we are actively pursuing the rest.

At no time did the programme of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements suffer. It is my understanding that all agencies with conferences to run have made similar contributions from their resources; and once the General Assembly voted to hold Habitat II, and designated UNCHS to serve as the conference secretariat, that conference became a high priority programme and activity of UNCHS. So this was nothing less than UNCHS contributing, or rather lending, resources to its own conference.

I should note, too, that when the General Assembly voted to hold Habitat I in 1976, it voted US\$7 million; when it voted 20 years later to hold Habitat II, it voted some \$US1.7 million. That, of course, is a fraction of what it will cost. But as I told the opening session of the Preparatory Committee last week: it is with great pride that I am able to report that we, through our own efforts, have been able to mobilize an additional US\$23 million, with the result that 95 per cent of the resources needed for Habitat II is coming from external sources.

What should be added, finally, is that the recommendation to hold the conference originated with the Commission on Human Settlements, which is the governing body of UNCHS, and which has since treated the Conference and its preparations as a programme of UNCHS. Indeed, the issue of the advance from the Foundation to support Habitat II activities was fully brought to the attention of the Commission at its 15th session last April when it adopted the budget of the Foundation for the current biennium.

In short, everything we have done relative to the financing of the Habitat II Conference is entirely in order. All member States have been kept fully informed from the outset, and why this should suddenly emerge as if it had been a big secret, is difficult to understand. Whatever the motivations or reasons, we cannot permit this to interfere with the preparatory process for a conference so vital to our collective future. The urbanizing world of the next century is already here. Our common responsibility is to meet its needs to the best and fullest of our abilities.