

Habitat III PrepCom 1 – New York 17 September 2014

Statement on the Preparations for the Conference and Progress to date in the implementation of the outcomes of Habitat II and identification of new and emerging challenges on sustainable urban development

Excellences,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to present you with a progress report, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 66/207, 67/216 and 68/239, on the activities carried out by the secretariat in preparation for the Habitat III Conference. My report also presents proposals for activities to be carried out during the preparatory process from 2014 to 2016 in four areas: knowledge, engagement, policy and operations. Pursuant to resolution 67/216, I will also present to you a review of the implementation of the outcomes of Habitat II and identification of new and emerging challenges on sustainable urban development.

In providing you with an update on preparations for the Conference, I would like to begin with the area of **knowledge**. In its resolution 24/14, the Governing Council of UN-Habitat invited member States to prepare, before the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat III, **national reports**. These reports should consider the

implementation of the Habitat Agenda. They should also describe new challenges, emerging trends and a prospective vision for sustainable human settlements and urban development, as a basis for the formulation of a “New Urban Agenda”,

Suggested **guidelines and a format** for the preparation of national reports were shared with member States in February 2013, and the deadline for delivering the national report was set at 30 June 2014.

In order to ensure the full participation of all relevant national stakeholders, I have recommended that member States use their **National Habitat Committees** to prepare their national reports. The Governing Council called upon member States to form National Habitat Committees where they did not exist and to strengthen existing Committees to ensure their effective and efficient participation in the Habitat III preparatory process, including in the preparation of national reports.

A few countries have submitted their national reports in advance of the first session of the Preparatory Committee. Member States are urgently encouraged to **finalize their national reports** before the end of 2014 in order to allow the Secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions, and other relevant organizations, to prepare regional reports. The regional reports will draw on the national reports, as well as on available knowledge, resources and data, as input for the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat III.

Moreover, the Habitat III preparatory process is a unique opportunity to improve the worldwide base of **urban knowledge**. This would be addressed by helping Governments, local authorities and civil society organizations to develop and apply policy-oriented urban indicators, statistics and other urban information. A working group on urban data will be proposed to strengthen current mechanisms assessing global progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda and to monitor and evaluate global urban conditions and trends.

In the area of **engagement**, I have paid particular attention to the important requests from the General Assembly. I intend to build on one of the main legacies of Habitat II – the need for **participation and partnership of local authorities**, civil society and grass-roots communities, the private sector, academia and researchers, parliamentarians, professional organizations, and children's, youth and women's groups, with a view to provide the basis for a comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable urban development.

New mechanisms for the promotion of transparency and the effective engagement of civil society should be explored. These will be aimed at enhancing the **working methods and processes** in the preparatory process and the Conference itself. The main objective will be to ensure informed discussions and contributions by all relevant stakeholders to the intergovernmental decision-making process.

The **World Urban Campaign** represents a key platform for public, private and civil society actors to share urban solutions and provide inputs to the process leading to the Conference. In the Medellin Declaration, adopted at the seventh session of the World Urban Forum, the participants paid particular recognition to the World Urban Campaign. The Campaign was acknowledged as a participatory process and partnership platform among actors of change working to ensure an inclusive and encompassing process towards Habitat III.

The World Urban Campaign will continue to engage all Habitat Agenda partners and new partners in order to debate urban challenges and policies, as well as identify good practices that could contribute to the New Urban Agenda. It will also actively engage in national urban campaigns and support communication and outreach activities to promote the participation of all stakeholders in national preparations for Habitat III.

The promotion of **national urban forums** at the national level would also contribute to enabling the effective participation and contribution of all Habitat Agenda partners at all stages of the preparatory process and at the Conference itself.

In the area of Policy, I have particularly noted the decision of General Assembly that the Conference should result in a **concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document**. The document would reinvigorate the global commitment to and support

for housing and sustainable urban development and the implementation of a “New Urban Agenda”.

Moving forward, I intend to establish the work of several policy units on thematic areas that can facilitate the collection of inputs to the Habitat III preparatory process in an innovative and inclusive way. Particular attention will be paid to the link between the **post-2015 development agenda** and its implementation in the New Urban Agenda to ensure proper coordination and substantive alignment between both processes.

An effective **United Nations system-wide coordination** mechanism will be established for the preparatory process after consultations with all agencies, building on the experience of the inter-agency committee created in 2013. It would work on progress made by the United Nations system in the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda and other relevant goals and targets.

In the area of **operations**, I would like to highlight that the General Assembly decided to establish a **trust fund for Habitat III**. It urged international and bilateral donors, as well as the private sector, financial institutions, foundations and other donors, to support the preparations for the Conference through voluntary contributions to and to support the participation of developing countries in meetings of the Preparatory Committee and at the Conference itself. The Habitat III secretariat will ensure transparency and accountability in the management of this trust fund.

I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to you to **contribute to the Habitat III trust fund**. Generous contributions will be important for a broad, inclusive and comprehensive preparatory process and successful conference. Contributions can be provided to support the planning and strategic work of the Habitat III secretariat or any of the four areas of work of the Habitat III preparatory process.

Excellences, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Some 18 years after the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, the international community is still grappling with urban challenges. Significant progress has been made towards attaining the goals agreed in Habitat II. However, there have also been setbacks and problems. As we have presented in the report you have before you on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, **new challenges have emerged** and the relationship between key sectors of society has evolved.

These new challenges and emerging issues will help inform our preparations of a New Urban Agenda for Habitat III.

1. Cities now represent more than half of the world's population. This **demographic shift** that took place in 2008, after the Habitat II Conference, has a profound impact on how our societies will be shaped in the future.
2. Secondly, urban expansion in many developing countries has often been characterized by informality, illegality and

unplanned settlements. In many cases, urban growth has been strongly associated with congestion and loss of urban character. With continuing population growth, including migration – and without appropriate responses – this process is likely to continue. At the core of this problem is lack of protection of the public space, and availability of accessible buildable plots. The lack of availability of well-designed and accessible buildable plots means that suitable land is not affordable to most of the urban population. In addition, there is a lack of the proper **urban planning and design** needed for balanced public spaces with buildable plots that can accommodate compact mixed use.

3. Thirdly, while high population growth remains a concern in the least developed countries, countries in many other parts of the world are grappling with slower population growth or even population decline. Globally, the number of elderly people, aged 60 and above, has more than doubled over the last three decades. In developing regions, many countries are experiencing a significant increase in the proportion in young people. This “youth bulge” could represent a potential opportunity to spur social and economic development if countries harness the potential of age-structure transformation. However, a youth bulge could also increase the risk of domestic conflict – in a context of poor governance, poor economic performance and greater inequalities.
4. **Inequality** has become a universal concern. Differences in access to opportunity, income, consumption, location, information and technology are now the norm, not the exception. Gender inequalities persist in many countries and

contexts. Slums – the most visible manifestation of urban poverty and inequality – continue to grow in most developing countries, reinforcing other forms of inequality.

5. An increasing number of urban residents in developed countries experience **poverty or social exclusion**. Even in the European Union, a quarter of the population falls in this category. In many cities, the persistence of intergenerational poverty and economic disadvantage is inextricably linked to location. It is also linked to ethnic or racial inequality and the historic marginalization of indigenous populations. In addition to these more conventional forms of poverty, however, new forms of social exclusion and marginalization are emerging: people who are infrastructure-poor, immigrant poverty, young people at risk, and vulnerable elderly, among others.

6. Finally, as the world becomes predominantly urban, the international debate on **climate change** becomes ever more urgent. There will be no solution to climate change without cities. Cities are responsible for as much as 70 % of the world's carbon emissions. A well planned and managed urbanization is a prerequisite for reduction in carbon emissions and for increased resilience to climate related disasters.

Habitat III is the ideal occasion for the international community to confront these challenges and seize the opportunities. The Conference will be one of the **first major global conferences** to be held after the adoption of the **post-2015 development agenda**. It will offer an opportunity to develop a shared perspective on human settlements and sustainable urban development. Not least, it will

give us a chance to discuss the challenges and opportunities that urbanization offers for the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Habitat III will also be closely linked to the climate change process in the United Nations.

There is a need to reinvigorate the **global partnership** and to strengthen different forms of regional and national cooperation for sustainable development, including by mobilizing the necessary resources for implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The implementation of this agenda will require the active engagement of national Governments and local authorities, civil society, the private sector and the United Nations system.

We started out on an ambitious journey almost 40 years ago, at the first Habitat conference, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976. We have learned a great deal since then, about what works and what does not. We have understood the costs of unplanned urbanization and the missed opportunities. Habitat III will give us an opportunity to work together to harness the powerful and under-used dynamic of sustainable urbanization to drive the development of our cultures, our societies and our economies for the next 20 years.

In closing, I wish the Preparatory Committee fruitful deliberations on the implementation of the outcomes of Habitat II and in the identification of new and emerging challenges on sustainable urban development.