

**Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on
Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)
Nairobi, 14-16 April 2015**

Joint Statement of the United Nations Regional Commissions

**Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Madame Co-Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to deliver to you this joint statement on behalf of the five United Nations Regional Commissions, namely ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA.

The urban agenda is more relevant and urgent today than ever before. For the first time in human history, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas, and urban dwellers are projected to increase to two-thirds of humanity by 2050. How this urban future unfolds will be fundamental to the world's economic, social, environmental and sustainability prospects. Cities can play a key role in the global sustainable development agenda. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon has affirmed "our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities".¹

Habitat III represents a unique opportunity to re-evaluate and recast urban policy at this critical juncture, in order to harness the transformative potential of urbanization, and to do so within sustainable boundaries. Habitat III will also provide an opportunity to operationalize the Post-2015 Development Agenda to be adopted by member States later this year. From a sustainable urban development perspective, Habitat III will provide a unique opportunity to discuss important challenges of how cities, towns and villages are planned and managed, in order to fulfill their role as drivers of sustainable development, and hence shape the implementation of new global development goals.

As the regional arm of the United Nations Secretariat, the Regional Commissions provide a critical platform to support governments to evaluate regional trends, share national experiences, identify priorities, develop capacity and translate global commitments into policy responses. Regional Commissions often undertake such work

¹ UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks to the High-level Delegation of Mayors and Regional Authorities in New York, 23 April 2012.

in partnership with other arms of the United Nations, and of course UN-Habitat, and beyond.

The relevance of the regional dimension in the preparations for Habitat III and the role of the Regional Commissions was recognized by the General Assembly, through its resolutions 67/216, 68/239, and 69/226, by ECOSOC, through resolution 2012/27 and by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat through resolution 24/14. In these resolutions the Regional Commissions are requested to contribute to each stage of the preparatory process, including through the preparation of Regional Reports, contributions to a Global Report, the convening of regional meetings and the utilization of their regular sessions to provide inputs. In line with this mandate, the Regional Commissions are currently, and will continue to actively support, the preparatory process for Habitat III at their respective regional levels.

On behalf of the five United Nations Regional Commissions I would like to take the opportunity to briefly highlight their ongoing role to the success of the Habitat III process.

In Africa, Habitat III is jointly prepared for by the Economic Commission for Africa and UN-Habitat. Preparations have started by the organization of a High-level Panel on Urbanization and Structural Transformation in Africa, held in the framework of the African Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development organized jointly by ECA, UN-Habitat and the African Union Commission (AUC). Preparations include also the drafting of the Africa Regional Report, and the organization of the Africa consultation and validation process of the Africa Regional Report. The Africa Regional Report will be drafted in 2015 based on national reports submitted by member States for further consolidation of information on progress made, challenges, emerging issues and recommendations, providing thus a regional perspective for Habitat III. Preparations will include consultations on the main findings of the Africa Regional Report that will be organized with different stakeholders, including regional and sub-regional organizations, mayors and CSOs. This consultative process will culminate in the Africa Regional Conference to be held in October 2015 to validate Africa's findings and recommendations. In the course of 2015, ECA will publish its report on Urbanization and Structural Transformation, to be presented to the ECA Committee on Gender and Social Development. ECA is also collaborating with the AUC in developing the Africa Position on Habitat III to be adopted, together with the Africa Regional Report, by the African Heads of State and Government in January 2016.

In Europe, the seventy-fourth session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, which took place in 2013, adopted a decision to prepare a regional report, "Challenges and Priorities in Housing and Urban Development in the ECE Region", as the Committee's contribution to HABITAT III. This regional report is being elaborated jointly with other partner international organisations and is based on short national

reports, which have by now been collected from 40 countries in the ECE region. The UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Housing and Land Management in 2013 adopted the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management 2014-2020. In November 2014, the Committee at its seventy-fifth session agreed on the text of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, which is expected to be adopted at the 66th session of the ECE Commission this week. The Geneva UN Charter and the Strategy are important tools to support the future implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the ECE region.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the most urbanized developing region in the world, preparations started in August 2014 at the XXIII session of the Forum of Ministries and High Authorities of Housing and Urban Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI). Here the decision was made to develop a report with the support of UN-ECLAC and UN-Habitat on the challenges, options and dilemmas facing the ministries at present, and in the post-2016 Habitat agenda. It was also declared that MINURVI would “advance the development of national reports to serve as inputs for regional documentation for Habitat III” and to “continue to work on the document produced by UN-ECLAC and UN-Habitat, which will inform the Regional Report prepared for Habitat III.” In August 2015 MINURVI will submit this document as an input to the global process and for the Regional Report. One of the most important issues next year will be to “update the Regional Plan of Action for Latin America and the Caribbean and to revisit the commitments made under the thematic areas for Istanbul+5 on human settlements in Latin America and the Caribbean,” which includes land, housing, public spaces, income and employment, and urban services.

In **Asia and the Pacific**, regional preparations for Habitat III were first tabled for discussion at the Third Session of the Committee on Environment and Development of ESCAP, held in October 2013. In noting the relevance of sustainable urban development for the region, the Committee recognized the importance of Habitat III and the role of ESCAP in convening regional preparations. The Committee further recommended that the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, scheduled to be held in 2015, be used to provide regional inputs to Habitat III. Subsequently, Resolution 70/12 adopted at the 70th Commission Session in August 2014, requested ESCAP to support the Government of Indonesia in organizing a High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting for Habitat III as an intergovernmental process, and to organize the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum back-to-back with the High-level meeting in order to provide substantive input to its deliberations.

The sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum and the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting for Habitat III for Asia-Pacific are now scheduled to take place back-to-back in Jakarta on 19-23 October 2015. The meetings will provide an opportunity to review regional trends, identify priorities and develop recommendations from a regional perspective to provide substantive inputs into Habitat III. The Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, which has been organized regularly by ESCAP since 1993, will provide a multi-stakeholder

perspective to complement and enrich the intergovernmental deliberations at the High-level meeting. The meetings will also provide an opportunity to present content and discuss the draft regional report for Habitat III, which ESCAP will be compiling in partnership with the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) in the course of 2015. A series of expert group meetings and workshops will be convened in preparation for the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum and the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting. In the course of the year ESCAP will also launch the *State of Asia-Pacific Cities 2015*, which is being prepared in partnership with UN-Habitat.

Madame Co-Chair

The Arab Region has changed dramatically since the convening of Habitat II in 1996. Issues of equity, equality, social cohesion, sustainability, decent housing and adequate public urban services have come to the forefront of priorities that need to be addressed. A new approach to housing and urban development is required in the region in order to meet the changing needs and aspirations of the region's population. It is anticipated that the Habitat III Urban Development Agenda will put into effect the mechanisms and implementation plans needed to ensure that Arab cities in the future will be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

ESCWA together with the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) and the League of Arab States (LAS) are jointly leading the regional preparation for Habitat III. Drawing on information provided by National Reports and other relevant sources, the Arab Regional Report is expected to discuss the challenges mentioned above, to present a baseline picture of the current status of the Arab city, against which we will be able to monitor progress, as well as chart our recommendations for the way forward. Broad consultations with key experts, government officials, civil society organizations, academia and private sector will enrich the process; UN partners will facilitate dialogue, discussions and consensus among various stakeholders in the region. The *1st Arab Ministerial Forum on Housing and Urban Development (AMFHU)*, scheduled for December this year, will be an excellent opportunity to agree on our plans for the future. Facilitated by LAS, an *Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development* is being prepared, as a means to guide the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda in the Arab region, with focus on housing and urbanization issues as well as the *New Urban Agenda* to be endorsed at Habitat III.

In conclusion, Madame Co-Chair,

The Regional Commissions would like to take this opportunity to reiterate their commitment to working in close partnership with the Habitat III secretariat, UN-Habitat, including at the regional level, and all other concerned bodies and agencies, to support member States in the preparatory process for Habitat III.

As mandated by the General Assembly, the Regional Commissions will continue to support member States in reviewing regional trends, sharing national experiences and identifying priorities, including through the preparation of Regional Reports and the convening of regional consultations, with a view to ensuring the success of Habitat III, which is an outcome critical to us all.

Mister/Madame Chair, on behalf of the five Regional Commissions of the United Nations Secretariat, I thank you for the opportunity to address distinguished delegates gathered here today.