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**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme
(UN-Habitat): progress report of the Executive Director**

**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme:
progress report**

Report of the Executive Director

Second session of the World Urban Forum

1. In its resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001, the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), among other things, to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.
2. The World Urban Forum focuses on international cooperation in shelter and urban development and serves as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat on these issues. To this end, the Forum (held biennially in the years in which the Governing Council of UN-Habitat does not meet) facilitates the exchange of experience and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners. As an initiative in global civic engagement, the World Urban Forum places strong emphasis on the participation of Habitat Agenda partners and relevant international programmes, funds and agencies, thus ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies.
3. A further function of the World Urban Forum is the elimination of overlap and the identification of synergies among development agencies in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Reports and recommendations from the World Urban Forum are submitted by the Executive Director to the Governing Council for consideration and appropriate action. The full report of the Second World Urban Forum is available in document HSP/GC/20/2/Add 2.

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4. Participation in the World Urban Forum is open to representatives from national Governments and Habitat Agenda partners. The latter include local authorities, the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, non-governmental and community-based organizations, human settlements professionals, research institutions and academies of science, the private, business and non-profit sectors, foundations, relevant United Nations organizations and other international agencies.
5. In pursuance of resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001, the first session of the World Urban Forum was held at the headquarters of UN-Habitat in Nairobi from 29 April to 3 May 2002. The main themes of the Forum were sustainable urban development and cities without slums. Some 1,200 participants from over 80 countries attended the meeting, including 400 senior officials and government experts, 100 representatives of local authorities, 350 representatives of non-governmental organizations and more than 200 slum dwellers, as well as United Nations agencies.
6. In May 2003, the Governing Council adopted resolution 19/14 on the World Urban Forum, Barcelona 2004, which requested the Executive Director to ensure that attendance at the session “be as inclusive as possible”, so as to facilitate “the optimum exchange of experiences and the advancement of collective knowledge among Governments, cities and their development partners in the field of shelter and sustainable urbanization.” In pursuance of this resolution, UN-Habitat made concerted efforts to increase the engagement and participation of Habitat Agenda partners within preparatory process leading to the second session of the World Urban Forum. Interest in the session far exceeded expected projections with a total of 4,389 participants. Of particular importance was the balanced level of participation from civil society, national Governments and local governments, constituting 25 per cent, 18 per cent and 17 per cent of participants respectively. This high level of participation was complemented by 203 representatives from the private sector, 201 academics, and 27 parliamentarians.
7. The opening session was graced by a number of leading personalities, including the late Mr. Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister of Lebanon, who received the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Special Citation for Post Conflict Reconstruction, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, former president of the USSR, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland, Mr. John Ashe, Chair of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Millennium Project, as well as a host of well-known mayors and prominent thinkers.
8. The second session of the World Urban Forum was witness to intensive debates on city management, finance, housing and infrastructure, sustainability, inclusiveness and urban risk. In addition, 92 networking events were held, four fifths of which were organized by Habitat Agenda partners. In line with the Governing Council’s decision to rotate the venue of the World Urban Forum, as a means of increasing participation from the regions, 65 per cent of delegates were from Europe and countries with economies in transition, a far greater percentage than that at most UN-Habitat meetings. In all, 11 per cent of participants were from Africa, 9 per cent from Latin America and the Caribbean, 7 per cent from Asia, 5 per cent from North America and 3 per cent from the Arab States.
9. One of the most prominent achievements of the Second World Urban Forum was to integrate the arts, culture and youth firmly into its organizational structure. The Oscar award-winning film director Fernando Trueba presented the world premiere of his film “Milagro de Candeal” (“The Miracle of Candeal”) before an audience of 4,000. Some 20,000 residents of the city of Barcelona joined our delegates in listening to the music of Carlinos Brown, who has used his immeasurable talent to change the lives of slum dwellers and children in an otherwise depressed community. Hip-hop artists from Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark (Greenland), Kenya, Norway, South Africa, Spain and the United States of America held a highly memorable “rap summit” and signed on as UN-Habitat messengers of truth.
10. Extensive evaluations were undertaken to assess the impact of the World Urban Forum through a mixture of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Over 90 per cent of respondents rated the second session of the World Urban Forum to as either very useful or useful. A total of 72 per cent indicated that they found the background papers, panellists and issues debated relevant to their needs. Of particular importance to participants was the opportunity to meet and network with a wide range of Habitat Agenda partners in an open forum.
11. Recommendations to improve future sessions of the World Urban Forum included: holding fewer and higher-profile dialogue sessions, shortening the length of the opening and closing sessions, increasing the financial resources available to enable the participation of representatives from developing countries and, in particular, women from those countries, strengthening the preparatory phase of the World Urban Forum by increasing the dissemination of information materials, enhancing

the participatory nature of networking and dialogue events and, finally, increasing the level of interpretation and translation to enhance the involvement of all participants.

12. If the World Urban Forum is to continue to grow in size and impact, additional financial resources will be required beyond those provided by host cities and Governments to enable the establishment of a permanent secretariat to the World Urban Forum within UN-Habitat.

13. Among the recommendations of the World Urban Forum, the following may be of particular relevance to the deliberations of the Governing Council:

(a) Cities in many parts of the world should make better use of culture as a central component of urban development strategies to capitalize on the economic benefits of globalization, including the redevelopment and global branding of cities through the promotion of cultural, heritage and tourism industries;

(b) An important dimension of globalization is international migration, which is giving rise to culturally cosmopolitan cities. Further efforts are required to understand international migration and its impact on cities;

(c) While there is an urgent need for more international aid to be targeted for slum upgrading, it is equally important that Governments design innovative strategies to mobilize domestic capital, including strengthening housing finance and micro-finance institutions;

(d) The global campaigns on good governance and secure tenure should seek to enhance access to public services and decision making for disadvantaged citizens through advocacy and capacity building;

(e) Establishing property rights, transparency and public accountability are essential to urban development and revitalization;

(f) Slum dwellers represent a resource with organizational and technical capabilities that are usually not captured in existing lending frameworks. Drawing slum dwellers into the formal economy contributes to both economic productivity and responsible citizenship;

(g) Governments should seek to create regulatory frameworks for public services which stimulate the private sector to operate in a way that benefits all citizens;

(h) Governments should seek to promote the provision of basic services by a range of providers, including multi-national and national companies, small-scale vendors and community-led initiatives, in order to meet the needs of a wide variety of users. Additional efforts are required to create partnerships between the private sector and the urban poor;

(i) The collection and dissemination of reliable data about slum dwellers should be expanded to the developing and monitoring of international and national poverty reduction strategies;

(j) In-situ upgrading should be the norm through the regularization of informal settlements and provision of security of tenure, while forced evictions should be avoided. Relocation should be used only in exceptional circumstances such as hazardous locations. The urban poor should be recognized as active agents and not passive beneficiaries in slum upgrading processes and in the design of city development strategies;

(k) Community-based organizations can provide crucial financial and organizational resources needed for urban revitalization. Women's micro-credit groups, in particular, have demonstrated excellent credit histories with financial institutions, and proved that the urban poor are bankable. Development agencies and financial institutions need to support their continued capacity-building;

(l) Legislation and affirmative action are required to ensure that current gender disparities are effectively addressed. Women's right to access property and to inherit should be both enshrined in law and implemented;

(m) Effective decentralization has the potential to help countries achieve sustainable development. A database of good practices and international guidelines would be a useful contribution to building capacity in this area;

(n) Most cities need international cooperation to realize their crucial contribution to sustainable development. The creation of United Cities and Local Government as the unified voice for

local government associations is a most welcome initiative and should provide major impetus for boosting the capacity of local governments to be effective partners in development;

(o) In many cases, solutions to complex development challenges lie in making better use of existing resources. Capacity-building, carefully targeted and monitored, should unleash unexpected potentialities for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda;

(p) Poverty is not simply lack of income but also lack of power. Inclusive, pro-poor governance should be promoted with a view to improving the capacity of local authorities to meet the goals set-out in the Millennium Declaration;

(q) In order to ensure sustainable urbanization, cities are encouraged to adopt ecologically sound budgeting principles as a means of planning and monitoring environmental initiatives;

(r) The role of local authorities in fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic should be better understood in view of their potential role in educating their citizens and facilitating the provision of adequate shelter and security of tenure for affected persons;

(s) Given the increasing number of conflicts and natural disasters, there is an urgent need to bridge the gap between emergency relief and reconstruction. Guiding principles based upon best practices in sustainable relief are required in order to bring about a comprehensive reduction in vulnerability and to ensure a sustainable recovery;

14. The Governing Council is invited to include these recommendations in the mainstream of the UN-Habitat work programme and to support their implementation at global, national and local levels.
