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

**Progress in the Implementation of the Special Human
Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People**

Report of the Executive Director

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* HSP/GC/20/1.

Introduction

1. In its resolution 19/18 of 9 May 2003 on human settlements development in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to report to it at its twentieth session on progress in the operations of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People (SHSPP), including progress in the mobilization of financial resources for the programme's technical cooperation trust fund. This report is prepared in pursuance of that request.

I. Establishment of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People

A. Background and justification

2. The Executive Director's report to the nineteenth session of the Governing Council, entitled "Implementation of resolution 18/12: housing situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and establishment of a human settlements fund for the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories" (HSP/GC/19/2/add.3), was the main background document for the consideration by the Governing Council of human settlements issues in the occupied Palestinian territories. The report documented the deplorable conditions in human settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the absence of strong institutions, policy frameworks, systems of data collection, and system of service delivery. It highlighted the serious human settlements problem exacerbated by conflict, poverty and the lack of Palestinian institutional capacity. The report provided an assessment of the housing situation and housing needs in the occupied Palestinian territories and described a special human settlements programme for the occupied Palestinian territories to be financed by a technical cooperation trust fund.

3. The report emphasized the need to intervene in the human settlements sector of the occupied Palestinian territories to respond to a range of existing gaps and constraints; raise the profile of human settlements activities; and contribute to peace building by improving living conditions. The main objectives of the proposed intervention as outlined in the report are to act as the driving force for elevating human settlements issues on the development agenda; to act as the principal instrument for ensuring a coherent and effective response to human settlements issues; and to build local capacities, especially at the municipal level, for responding to human settlements challenges.

4. The report recommended that UN-HABITAT mount an intensive campaign among United Nations Member States and the broader international donor community to raise financial contributions for the programme. The campaign should include: an immediate appeal to raise seed capital for the trust fund from those countries that have already expressed interest in supporting the programme; and an appeal to financial institutions, especially in the Middle East, to secure additional funding for the programme through its trust fund.

B. Adoption of resolution 19/18: Human settlements development in the occupied Palestinian territories

5. At its nineteenth session, the Governing Council, noting with appreciation the above-mentioned report, adopted by consensus resolution 19/18. In the resolution, the Governing Council noted that it was conscious of the special housing and human settlements needs of the Palestinian people and recognized that they fell within the technical mandate of UN-HABITAT; recognized that shelter and human settlements are key elements in reaching long-term sustainable peace in the Middle East; expressed the hope that the Israelis and the Palestinians would renew efforts to develop jointly a human settlements programme for the Palestinian people; endorsed the establishment of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People and the Technical Cooperation Trust Fund, funded in the amount of \$5 million, for an initial period of two years; and urged the international donor community and all financial institutions to support UN-Habitat in the immediate mobilization of financial resources towards the establishment and operation of the programme and the fund.

6. The resolution represents recognition by all parties of the urgent need to resolve the long-term deterioration in human settlements conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories. It marks an important precedent for UN-Habitat, which had never before undertaken programmes in the occupied Palestinian territories. On the occasion of the adoption of the resolution, the Executive Director stated that "the passing of this resolution signals a sense of optimism, especially as shelter and human

settlements are key elements in reaching long-term sustainable peace in the Middle East.” It was in this spirit, and encouraged by the cooperation of all parties leading to the adoption of the resolution by consensus, that UN-Habitat embarked on the immediate implementation of the resolution.

II. Programme objectives, outputs and activities

7. The long-term development objective of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People is to improve the human settlements conditions of the Palestinian People and in so doing contribute in a modest way to reaching peace, security and stability in the region. The immediate aims of the programme are to build the requisite capacity and help establish a housing policy and delivery system. The programme will in particular help in:

- (a) Institutional capacity-building and strengthening of coordination mechanisms of relevant bodies of the Palestinian Authority responsible for housing delivery and urban management, through multi-stakeholder consultations; shelter delivery and urban management training seminars; strengthening mechanisms for urban planning; and consultation on urban issues;
- (b) Promoting affordable housing finance through field testing of unconventional lending instruments tailored to the needs of low income households, building on the experience of domestic commercial lending, micro finance instruments and community based mortgage mechanisms;
- (c) Enhancement of capacity of research institutions through the establishment of a Palestinian urban observatory, the development and use of urban indicators, enhanced demographic and health surveys and increased capacity of local research institutions;
- (d) Supporting the development of a Palestinian human settlements policy, including legislation on secure tenure, land use management, building codes and shelter delivery;
- (e) Establishment of institutional framework for a GIS – based cadastral system, initially in the zone known as Area A.

8. The programme features two phases, beginning with a programme definition phase (March 2004–December 2004) designed to situate UN-Habitat institutionally in the occupied Palestinian territories, raise funds, assess conditions and define programme elements. The programme implementation phase (January 2005–January 2006) is designed to undertake the above-mentioned activities and achieve the stated objectives.

III. Operationalizing the programme

A. Appointment of the Coordinator, the Habitat Programme Manager and the National Project Director

9. Following the adoption of the resolution, UN-Habitat initiated preparatory work to establish and operationalize the programme and mobilize international donor contributions to the technical cooperation trust fund to finance the activities of the programme. On 1 March 2004, Mr. Abdalla Abbas was appointed as the Coordinator for the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People. Mr. Abbas is a Sudanese diplomat with long working experience in the United Nations and comes to the organization from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Anchored institutionally in the Office of the Executive Director, the Coordinator is currently based in the UN-Habitat office in Geneva and undertakes regular missions to the Middle East, New York and Nairobi. A National Project Director in Gaza and a Habitat Programme Manager in Ram Allah have been recruited to assist him in implementing the programme. As part of his coordinating and oversight duties, the Coordinator maintains close contacts with Government officials in the region, with donor representatives, and with officials of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the World Bank.

10. During his orientation mission to Nairobi, the Coordinator was officially presented to the Committee of Permanent Representatives in March 2004. He seized the opportunity to engage in consultations with representatives of member States to brief them on the envisaged activities, expected outputs and resource requirements for the technical cooperation trust fund.

B. Launching the programme in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel

11. The Coordinator undertook his first mission to the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel during the period 8–20 May 2004, at which time he launched the programme through a series of high-level meetings with officials, local authorities, research institutions, donor representatives and representatives of United Nations system organizations. Palestinian and Israeli officials welcomed the presence of UN-Habitat in the occupied Palestinian territories and the launching of the programme and pledged their full support to ensure its success. The Coordinator received full cooperation from all parties during his first and subsequent missions.

C. Present status and prospects of the technical cooperation trust fund

12. The Executive Director indicated in her aforementioned report that during the first two years of the programme, UN-Habitat would seek to capitalize the technical cooperation trust fund at approximately \$5 million, with subsequent expansion tailored to the availability of resources, to growing implementation capacity, and to changing political and economic circumstances. Immediately following the adoption of resolution 19/18 by the Governing Council, the Executive Director launched an appeal inviting member States to contribute to the fund.

13. The Government of the United States of America made the first contribution to the trust fund, in the amount of \$500,000. That contribution enabled UN-Habitat to launch the programme. The second contribution of 2 million Swedish Krona (approximately \$275,000) was made by the Government of Sweden. The Government of Sudan has pledged \$70,000. The Government of Turkey has offered to provide technical assistance and technical expertise with respect to the programme framework. The Municipality of Dubai and the Al-Mahktoum Foundation in Dubai are currently considering financing some programme activities. UN-Habitat managerial and administrative support, expertise and software constitute an in-kind contribution estimated at \$252,000. The Coordinator gave a presentation on the programme at a meeting of Arab financial and development institutions convened by the League of Arab States in Cairo on 7 September 2004 as part of the preparatory process for an Arab international forum for rehabilitation and development in the occupied Palestinian territories. This is being followed-up with visits to the headquarters of those institutions for further discussions.

14. It should be recalled here that the preparation of the Executive Director's report to the nineteenth session of the Governing Council and other related activities were facilitated by a generous grant of \$100,000 from the Sultanate of Oman.

15. The successful implementation of the programme is dependent to a large extent on financial contributions by member States to the technical cooperation trust fund.

16. The trust fund will be managed, monitored and evaluated in accordance with established UN-Habitat procedures, thus rendering it transparent and acceptable to potential donors.

IV. Ongoing programme activities

A. Urban sector profile study

17. UN-Habitat is undertaking, in the context of the programme, an urban sector profile study for the occupied Palestinian territories. This study is based on the European Commission's "Consultative Guidelines for Sustainable Urban Development Cooperation: Towards Sustainable Urban Development, A Strategic Approach".

18. The study was undertaken, through a participatory approach, by a team lead by the Director, Center for Urban and Regional Planning, An-Najah National University, Nablus, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and its institutions; local authorities; and research institutions. Intensive consultations involving a variety of stakeholders at the national and local levels are being held to discuss relevant issues. Based on this broad-based participatory process, the study will identify priority areas of interventions that will be integrated in a strategy to support the sustainable development of towns and cities in the occupied Palestinian territories. This action-oriented study will provide the basis for interventions to be addressed by the programme.

B. Local and national urban observatories

19. UN-Habitat has received a request from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to finance the establishment of an interactive statistical atlas of the occupied Palestinian territories in the amount of \$63,000. The primary objective of the atlas is to develop a system that would allow access to statistical data integrated with a spatial component through the Internet. Such an atlas would be an excellent mechanism for developing related Global Urban Observatory activities such as urban inequities studies and promoting the establishment of national and local urban observatories. The programme has also received a request for financing in the amount of \$51,500 for a geographic information system (GIS) laboratory for the master's programme in urban planning and design at Birzeit University, Ram Allah, and a request for €126,825 for a GIS centre for the water supply and sanitation department of the Nablus Municipality. Both proposals have been submitted to potential donors for financing. The Global Urban Observatory is in the process of approving the provision of GIS software and related training packages to selected local authorities and research institutions. The Global Urban Observatory has already approved the provision of GIS software to selected local authorities and research institutions.

C. Defining a strategy for land administration and information systems in the occupied Palestinian territories

20. This proposal was drafted on the basis of needs identified by UN-Habitat at a land administration workshop organized in July 2004, by the Palestinian Authority's Land Authority, in cooperation with the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The rationale for this proposal is that a range of issues affect efficient land administration in the occupied Palestinian territories. The land laws and regulations are a mixture of tradition and rules, some of which date back to the early Islamic era, the period of Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, Jordanian rule and Egyptian rule, with respect to Gaza, and also include Israeli military orders. In view of this complexity, business at present is transacted and disputes concerning land are settled for the most part outside the formal legal system, through family networks and administrative structures.

21. Considering the volatility of all land-related activities within the occupied Palestinian territories, it is considered both prudent and strategic to engage relevant stakeholders in technical consultations in order to map out a strategy for the long term development of land administration and information systems. A key aspect of this process, in anticipation of further favourable political developments, will be to ensure the development and implementation of a land administration strategy and the capacity of the Palestinian Authority to manage land resources in its territory effectively and equitably.

22. The proposal envisions in its early weeks mobilizing relevant personnel within applicable ministries, academic institutions, the international community and the private sector to produce substantive inputs to the key elements outlined above. The primary research produced in this period will be discussed during a three day meeting to be held outside the occupied Palestinian territories, likely in Geneva in the first quarter of 2005. The meeting will comprise several working sessions designed to produce the outputs identified above, and these will define the scope and scale, if not the detail, of a strategy for the development of land administration and information systems for the occupied Palestinian territories. The meeting will be facilitated by experts chosen for their recognized abilities in relation to the elements identified above. The cost of the preparatory process for the meeting and for convening the meeting, including the travel and daily subsistence allowance of 35 participants, is estimated at \$196,000.

23. Initiating and following up with specific activities related to the consultative engagement with key actors in the land administration field both within and outside the occupied Palestinian territories will set the boundaries and process for the development of comprehensive land administration and information systems in a constructive and non-confrontational manner. This process is intended, in the absence of existing strategic and comprehensive planning, to provide both UN-Habitat and relevant land administration institutions a set of baseline information from which an integrated and comprehensive land administration strategy can be developed. It is expected that the initial three-day meeting will be the first of a series of consultations both within and outside the occupied Palestinian territories to further the process of refining and implementing the development of land administration and information systems.

V. Cooperation with partners

24. The programme is designed to complement related initiatives of the Palestinian Authority and of development partners working in the occupied Palestinian territories, in order to avoid duplication. Particular attention is paid to fostering synergies between the programme and these initiatives, as well as with Palestinian academic and research institutions working on human settlements issues and capacity-building. In this context, the programme has successfully built on the wide ranging consultations conducted by UN-Habitat prior to and following the adoption of resolution 19/18. Subsequent to the adoption of resolution 19/18 and the appointment of the Coordinator, UN-Habitat has participated in a number of conferences, meetings and workshops to raise awareness about the programme, seek advice and support of partners, and establish strong working relationships with partners.

25. In this context, UN-Habitat participated in the following events:

- (a) Meetings organized in 2004 by the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (Geneva, Cape town and New York);
- (b) A high-level conference on meeting the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees in the Near East and building partnerships in Support of UNRWA, Geneva, 7–8 June 2004;
- (c) A meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cities and Towns (OICC), April 2004, Dubai, United Arab Emirates;
- (d) A workshop on land administration and land management organized by the Palestinian Land Authority in cooperation with the World Bank and USAID, Ram Allah, July 2004;
- (e) The aforementioned Arab international forum on rehabilitation and development in the occupied Palestinian territories, Beirut, 11–14 October 2004, and the preparatory process leading up to it. UN-Habitat was a member of the advisory group for the forum and organized during the forum a session on city-to-city cooperation. UN-Habitat also sponsored the participation of a number of representatives of local authorities and research institutions in the forum;
- (f) Weekly meetings of the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) in Geneva, at which issues related to the occupied Palestinian territories feature regularly on the agenda, and in which the programme Coordinator participates;

26. In addition, the programme is supporting cooperation between the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA) and the Union of Local Authorities in Israel (ULAI). UN-Habitat sponsored the participation of the President of APLA and the Deputy Director of ULAI in the second World Urban Forum.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

27. UN-Habitat is making steady progress in the implementation of the activities envisaged in the first phase of the programme. This has been facilitated by the timely financial contributions made thus far to the technical cooperation trust fund and the cooperation and support extended to the Coordinator by all partners, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories and by the Government of Israel.

28. It should be noted that the Programme has been received well by principal officials and partners of the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel, and by other agencies of the United Nations family. The Deputy Minister of Housing of the Palestinian Authority and the Ambassador of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva have both expressed appreciation for the style and balanced approach adopted by UN-Habitat in its efforts to advance the programme. Similar sentiments were expressed by the President of APLA and the Deputy Director General of ULAI subsequent to their participation at the World Urban Forum. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA also conveyed her appreciation for UN-Habitat's work on the programme.

29. As already mentioned, a number of priority areas have been identified in consultations with the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, local authorities and research institutions. With the appointment of the Habitat Programme Manager in Ramallah and the National Project Director in Gaza, the implementation of activities identified in those priority areas, along with other activities envisaged in the second phase of the programme, will be accelerated.

30. This makes it crucial that member States and the broader international donor community respond positively to the Executive Director's appeal to contribute generously to the technical cooperation trust fund in order to enhance the implementation capacity of the programme and to facilitate its gradual expansion to address the daunting human settlements challenges in the occupied Palestinian territories.
