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**Special themes: post-conflict and natural and human-made
disasters assessment and reconstruction**

**Post-conflict, natural and human-made disasters assessment and
reconstruction**

Summary

The present theme paper on sustainable relief and reconstruction in post-conflict, natural and human-made disasters is submitted for the consideration of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) at its twenty-first session. Disasters can provide opportunities for sustainable development but sustainable relief and reconstruction require that rehabilitation efforts are integrated into long-term development strategies. The theme of mobilizing sustainable relief and reconstruction – transforming disasters into opportunities for sustainable development – explores problems and possibilities including vulnerability, risk mitigation, planning and response. The aim is to develop guidelines for sustainable relief and reconstruction in order to provide a framework for development-oriented sustainable relief and reconstruction activities.

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I. Introduction

1. In the Habitat Agenda¹, the participants at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements “preventing man-made disasters ... and reducing the impacts of natural disasters and other emergencies on human settlements, inter alia, through appropriate planning mechanisms and resources for rapid, people-centred responses that promote a smooth transition from relief, through rehabilitation, to reconstruction and development....”²
2. Increasingly frequent natural and human-made disasters that cause extensive loss of life, damage to property and harm to the environment often turn back the development clock. Disasters perpetuate poverty as they force developing countries to postpone national development programmes thus worsening already precarious social, economic and environmental conditions, particularly in human settlements. Increased frequency of disasters makes sustainable development in affected areas impossible. Many parts of the world are caught in a disaster and re-building cycle whereby the damage may be repaired but the causes underlying the devastation are critically overlooked. Although hazards exist in both developed and developing countries, they often impact more severely and repeatedly in developing countries, where institutional capacity is lowest, leaving large populations of the poorest inhabitants chronically vulnerable.
3. The number and nature of armed conflicts have changed significantly in recent years. Today’s conflicts are mostly fought within State boundaries, whereas in the past, wars took place across them. Wars are no longer fought only on battlefields between professional armies; rather, they are often waged in cities and villages by amateur militia, driven by long-simmering ethnic and religious ideologies and fueled by a struggle for political and economic control. As a result, more than 90 per cent of the victims of today’s wars are civilians and, of those, women and children bear an inordinate burden. Twenty million refugees are in need of immediate protection and assistance³. An additional 25 million people are currently displaced within their own countries as a result of violence and human rights abuses⁴.
4. Particular importance is attached to what is termed “urban risk”. Today, more people live in urban areas than ever before in human history. The trend of urbanization is irreversible. It has been estimated that the world’s urban population will double to more than five billion by 2025, with 90 per cent of the increase taking place in the developing world.⁵ This is the numerical face of urbanization. Cities hold incredible potential as engines of growth and social development, yet the inequalities found in them are tremendous. The grim reality of many of today’s cities includes unemployment, violence, pollution, insecurity, sub-standard living conditions, poor health, malnutrition and high infant mortality.
5. Poor people everywhere, especially in urban areas, are most at risk. The world’s poor live in densely populated squatter settlements on the periphery of cities that lack the basic necessities of life, leaving many inhabitants caught in a spiral of increasing vulnerability. Recent figures show that a quarter of the world’s urban population does not have adequate housing and often lacks access to clean water and sanitation.⁶ Demand for commercial and residential land in cities has led to use of unsuitable terrain prone to natural hazards. As a result, many informal settlements are located in dangerous or untenable areas such as floodplains, unstable slopes or reclaimed land. In the absence of secure tenure, there is little reason for communities to invest in upgrading housing or infrastructure standards. Moreover, cities are often unable to manage rapid population growth; poorly planned urbanization with increasing numbers of inadequately constructed and badly maintained buildings are further increasing vulnerabilities in cities. Ironically, most of today’s largest cities are in areas where earthquakes, floods, landslides and other disasters are most likely to happen. Poverty alleviation must therefore be central to any plan to mitigate and manage disasters effectively.

¹ Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3–14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

² The Habitat Agenda, Chapter III, Commitments / B. Sustainable Human Settlements.

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, www.unhcr.ch/statistics.

⁴ Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Internal Displacement Unit, www.reliefweb.int/idp.

⁵ UN-Habitat, Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, Towards Poverty Reduction, www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/tenure/bboard/poverty.htm.

⁶ Road map towards implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Declaration, Goal 7, Target, 11, para. 118.

6. As the nature of disasters in cities becomes more complex, so must the approach to their management. It can be argued that many natural disasters are anything but “natural”, and occur as a result of deficient urban management practices, inadequate planning, population density, ecological imbalance, etc. The solutions are not to be found on a drawing board alone, but lie in improving the decisions made in managing the growth and development of cities, including mitigation and preparedness strategies. This is particularly important in managing the new global trend; mega-cities – metropolitan areas with over ten million inhabitants. At present, there are at least 25 mega-cities in the world, many of which have experienced the devastating impacts of disasters, and most of which accommodate ever-increasing mega-slums. Unsupported urbanization will constrain the sustainable development of cities hamper the well-being of their inhabitants, increasing their vulnerability to future conflicts and disasters.

7. At the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the international community endorsed Agenda 21 as a master plan to achieve sustainable development. Together with the Habitat Agenda, Agenda 21 marked the turning point in international efforts to promote sustainable development, which was no longer seen as a demonstration of good will, but a necessity. Governments reaffirmed their commitment to a sound and fair world in the new millennium through their commitment to meet the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration⁷.

8. The objective of sustainable development is a key element in all global agendas. Their recommendations, commitments and areas of action vary widely, but reducing the vulnerability of people and communities at risk from the threats of natural and human-caused disasters is common throughout. The reduction of vulnerabilities and the protection of citizens and assets from the impacts of disasters should be an indispensable part of national plans and strategies for sustainable development. It is equally imperative, particularly in developing countries, to grasp opportunities during post-crisis recovery periods to ensure an effective transition to sustainable development.

II. Sustainable relief and reconstruction

9. The changing nature of conflict and natural disasters is leading to the re-examination of traditional approaches to relief assistance and reconstruction. Natural and human-caused emergencies are increasing in regularity and, perhaps more importantly, their impacts on populations and human settlements are rising alarmingly. Coupled with cycles of dependency and shortages of resources, this points to the need to develop innovative approaches and re-examine traditional policies on relief and reconstruction assistance. The international community is performing an ever-widening range of relief and rehabilitation activities. This exacerbates the fundamental challenges of crisis management and recovery processes: how to bridge the gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency relief and sustainable development efforts; how to provide national and local government, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises; and how to prevent affected populations from lapsing back into crisis. It is equally critical to build the capacity of national and international aid agencies to deliver rapid response services that integrate a longer-term developmental strategy. Based on these changing dynamics in international assistance, it is clear that a new approach is required. The concept of sustainable relief and reconstruction has emerged through analysis of these needs.

A. Mitigation: building a culture of prevention

10. Mitigation is the first step towards a comprehensive approach to managing disasters. Disaster mitigation is defined as sustained action to reduce or eliminate the impacts and risks associated with natural and human-caused disasters. Communities are often unaware of the hazards they face, do not put much trust in mitigation strategies and rely heavily on emergency responses from others when the need arises. The focus on mitigation, prevention and preparedness⁸ is a particularly important aspect of sustainable relief and reconstruction. Concepts of sustainability and sustainable development offer a crucial framework for integrating vulnerability reduction plans in to disaster recovery. Sustainable human settlements development can not often prevent disasters from happening, but it can help to mitigate their impacts.⁹ Disaster mitigation and management needs to look beyond hazards alone to consider prevailing conditions

⁷ General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

⁸ For the purposes of this paper, the term mitigation will encompass the prevention, mitigation and preparation phases of the disaster management framework.

⁹ UN-Habitat, *Cities in a Globalizing World*, chapter 15, page 182.

of vulnerability. It is the social, cultural, economic and political setting in a country that defines the level of vulnerability or resilience of its people and communities to disasters¹⁰.

11. The cornerstone of the implementation strategy is to build a “culture of prevention” in society at large. Such a culture will not only save lives, but will also enhance the economic and social fabric through working with cities and civil societies to reduce their vulnerability to natural and human-caused disasters, and will also provide sustainable solutions for the reconstruction of war-torn societies. Disaster management and mitigation should be introduced, therefore, as an integral part of development and poverty reduction plans. Civil empowerment is a fundamental complement to any mitigation exercise undertaken within cities or by civil society. Without a common understanding of the necessity for mitigation measures, without the active participation of civil society in execution, and without a community’s sense of ownership, such measures stand a slim chance of reducing disasters or resolving conflicts.

B. Response: meeting the long-term needs of many while supporting the emergency needs of few

12. When conflicts occur or hazards cause disasters, human settlements, people and property are always among the most affected. Any recovery process, irrespective of its short- or long-term planning horizon, has, therefore, to consider, in addition to meeting urgent human needs, the physical infrastructure and human settlements problems that arise, including adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development. In many post-crisis scenarios, experience has shown that interventions are most effective when they are designed to begin simultaneously; consideration of long-term impacts of short-term interventions can add value to the latter and depth to the former. For that reason, the process of long-term reconstruction and economic recovery should begin while post-emergency actions aimed at restoring normalcy for affected populations returning home or settling in new places are being undertaken. In this manner, strategic investment during emergency and relief and reconstruction stages can contribute significantly to building foundations for development.

13. Post-crisis responses by national Governments, bilateral partners, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies have been characterized by rapid rehabilitation projects relating to water and sanitation, housing, irrigation, food security and health. Piecemeal efforts that are not connected to a long-term development strategy can not only aggravate precarious social conditions by creating dependency on aid, but are a critical waste of financial and human resources invested in short-sighted emergency relief and reconstruction plans. The real challenge lies in broadening the portfolios of humanitarian and developmental actors and in bringing them together in shared realization of recovery processes for sustainable development.

14. The recovery phase can also offer a unique opportunity to revisit past practices and rewrite policies affecting future development in disaster-prone areas. A range of mitigation measures, for example, can be incorporated during recovery to promote vulnerability reduction in areas such as land-use, environmental and community planning and improvement of building codes and construction regulations. Beyond the physical aspects of rehabilitation, the recovery period also offers an opportunity for society at large to strengthen local organizational capacities and to promote networks, awareness and political mechanisms facilitating economic, social and physical development long after a disaster – that is, to build its own sustainability.

III. From disasters to sustainable settlements

15. How does a community become sustainable? The concept of sustainability evolves around three key elements: economic growth, environmental protection and social development. It means that a community is a good, safe and healthy place for its members, offering a solid foundation for a prosperous life with equal opportunities for all. There are six established principles for enhancing community sustainability. They are:¹¹

- (a) Maintain and, if possible, enhance quality of life;
- (b) Enhance local economic vitality;

¹⁰ UNISDR, ‘Living with Risk’, chapter 1.

¹¹ Mileti, Dennis S., ‘Disasters by Design’ (1999), p. 31.

- (c) Ensure social and inter-generational equity;
- (d) Maintain and, if possible, enhance environmental quality;
- (e) Incorporate disaster resilience and mitigation;
- (f) Use a consensus-building, participatory process when making decisions.

16. By integrating the principles of sustainability from the earliest stages of recovery in human settlements, strategic investment during emergency stages can contribute significantly to building foundations for development. Aware of the complexity of the post-crisis recovery process from the human settlements perspective, UN-Habitat has elaborated and applied a set of specific strategies from transitional phase recovery to medium- to long-term development in order to promote peace building, poverty reduction, disaster mitigation and sustainable development of human settlements.

A. Safety, security and reconstruction strategy

17. The first precondition for achieving sustainable recovery and resettlement of displaced populations is to address the challenge of ensuring security and protection, and the elimination of circumstances and occurrences that generate dispute and conflict.

18. Shelter is one of the most visible and immediate needs in post-crisis settings. Relief and reconstruction efforts are often focused on providing shelter quickly without taking into account the impact of short-term shelter strategies. Long-term shelter strategies do not only focus on determination and implementation of realistic and permanent reconstruction plans for affected communities, but also tie up with rebuilding community confidence and support structures for civic responsibility and urban governance through participatory planning of reconstruction processes. Shelter issues are closely bound to mitigation aspects as well, particularly in disasters. The development of disaster-resistant housing is a major factor in reducing vulnerability to disasters. Shelter issues in mitigation, however, go beyond the structural. Rights to ownership and security of tenure make an enormous difference to the maintenance, management and development of shelter, particularly in urban areas.

19. Access to resources such as land and water is often an underlying cause of conflict. With careful understanding of antecedents, any imbalances and sensitive situations must be addressed through both formal and traditional systems to ensure equitable access and use of resources by all communities. In the same vein, the system for allocation, use and registration of land and property will need to be rationalized. Security of tenure, access to land and solutions for land and property dispute resolution are central issues, therefore, in disaster response, in particular with reference to displaced populations.

B. Ensuring sustainable returns and re-integration

20. At least 25 million people spread over 52 countries are displaced by violence, persecution and/or disasters but remain within the borders of their own countries¹². Internally displaced persons constitute the single most vulnerable population in the world. They are often subject to physical violence, and women and children are particularly vulnerable, as they are at the highest risk of losing everything. Most important, unlike refugees, internally displaced persons do not have legal status to protect their lives and rights. Large-scale movements of populations away from vulnerable areas during conflict or disaster often lead to their longer-term displacement. This displacement results from chronic insecurity, lack of rehabilitation of disaster-struck areas or inability to return due to other constraints. The response in addressing the immediate needs of the displaced must consider their longer-term needs either in situ or in their places of origin. During the response phase after disaster or conflict, displaced populations tend to be treated as beneficiaries rather than partners in the recovery process. Displaced populations in fact represent future human resources in the post-conflict and post-crisis environments.

¹² Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Internal Displacement Unit, www.reliefweb.int/idp.

C. Promoting economic development during recovery

21. Natural and human-made disasters destroy investments, infrastructure and livelihoods. Poverty and lack of resources increases vulnerability, weakens coping strategies and delays the recovery process. A vibrant local economy is one of the key elements in sustainable recovery and development, yet economic recovery is also recognized as one of the most difficult aspects of the process. Despite disasters, many communities have resources that can be tapped, such as the availability of local building materials, the existence of a labour force and, most importantly, the eagerness of local communities and the private sector to participate in the recovery process. Re-establishing small-scale production in affected areas, creating employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs and the community itself – both affected, displaced and host communities – and reinforcing the local building sector all contribute to sustainable recovery. All in all, strategic physical reconstruction of housing, infrastructure, public facilities and utilities plays a fundamental role in the success of local economies.

D. Good governance in post-crisis situations

22. Public participation and inclusive decision-making are well recognized as central elements in the UN-Habitat Global Campaign on Urban Governance. Good urban governance contributes to reduction of vulnerability, enables the development of mitigation and recovery methodologies and empowers civil society to act on its own behalf. The principles of good urban governance – equity, efficiency, transparency, civic engagement and security – are key for sustainable development and disaster mitigation and management.

23. Cities are managed and communities interact at the local level. Inclusive decision-making is at the heart of good urban governance, and participation of civil society is crucial to achieving sustainable disaster recovery. At no time is the opportunity for public involvement in decision-making greater than when a community is faced with the practical problems of recovering from a disaster¹³. Inclusive decision-making, including women in particular, is a key element in building consensus among different participants in the emergency phase, ensuring active participation of affected populations, community groups and local authorities in the subsequent recovery phases.

24. The principles of good governance are critical in disaster management and sustainable recovery, in particular in post-crisis scenarios involving nascent or custodial local governments. Good governance enhances institutional capacities and decision-making processes affecting economic recovery, development and activities. It is a process of decision-making for the formulation of national or local disaster reduction plans and policies and it is a system of policy implementation and requires the existence of well functioning organizations at national and local level to implement and enforce land-use planning, building codes, safety standards and disaster response mechanisms¹⁴. In the absence of good governance, communities become increasingly dangerous and unhealthy places to live and work, especially for the most vulnerable people. Promotion of good governance serves, therefore, as a cornerstone of sustainable recovery and development in human settlements.

E. Addressing sustainable urbanization in post-crisis situations

25. Urbanization in post-conflict contexts is a phenomenon that must be prioritized within a sustainable recovery framework. Urban centres are increasingly focal points for economic opportunity, provoking large-scale – and often long-term – displacement during and after conflict. Urban centres also attract people seeking better infrastructure and services – education and health in particular – than they can find in rural areas. Many of the expected jobs and educational opportunities in urban areas are not realized, and resulting crime, ethnic tensions and rising poverty create new threats to peace, security and development.

26. The impacts of natural disasters are magnified in urban centres, not only as a result of population density, but due to other vulnerabilities such as dependency on infrastructure and urban services, poor planning, bad and illegal construction practices and ecological exploitation of the environment that are unique to the urban context. Cyclical vulnerability to disasters in rural areas also leads to movements of populations to cities, further stretching existing urban capacities.

¹³ Sarah Michaels, University of Colorado, Participatory Process (Holistic Disaster Recovery 2001), page 3-1.

¹⁴ UNDP/BCPR World Vulnerability Report 2003, draft, chapter 3, p. 21.

F. Gender and the involvement of women

27. Sustainable relief and reconstruction strategies can affect the long-term objective of promoting gender equality in societies coping with disasters and conflicts. The coping strategies and priorities of men and women are different and an approach that takes gender into account is critical to ensuring that all needs are met. Women are not only effective managers of resources, mobilizing communities and keeping the peace, but are often the first responders, and should be included in policy-making processes at higher levels. Women as a group also tend to be more vulnerable to the effects of disaster and conflict. It is clear that promoting development, which enables women to mitigate these impacts and reduce their own vulnerability, will have the greatest overall effect. The impacts of conflict on women – and women's roles in conflict – must be a major consideration when developing sustainable relief and reconstruction strategies. In many cases, relief and reconstruction activities categorize women as victims and beneficiary recipients in programming rather than enabling them to be actively involved and increase their capacity through relief and reconstruction activities. A sustainable relief and reconstruction approach will allow for a better understanding of the diversity of women's roles and experiences in conflict, thus improving the overall effectiveness of interventions from a gender perspective.

G. Creating strategic partnerships

28. The human settlements component is integral to post-crisis solutions from refugee-settlements planning to development of strengthened institutional capacities, good governance and reviving the local economy. In order to develop an integrated approach to sustainable rehabilitation of human settlements, however, limited resources must be coordinated to achieve the maximum possible effect. The multisectoral and interdisciplinary nature of disaster reduction and response requires continuous interaction, cooperation and partnership among related institutions and stakeholders to achieve global objectives of disaster mitigation and sustainable post-crisis recovery. Solutions to ensure sustainable recovery are interwoven in such a manner that activities cannot be implemented in isolation. Building strategic partnerships among all stakeholders, including civil society, national or local governments, the private sector, the media and national or international support agencies is, therefore, a shared challenge and responsibility. In combination with other activities, it contributes to the development of a coherent framework for sustainable recovery of human settlements in post-crisis situations.

H. Strengthening national and local capacities

29. Post-crisis activities provide unique opportunities for increasing capacities among all national and local actors involved in the recovery process. At the national level, this may require strengthening policy-making capacities and formulating legal instruments for implementation of national vulnerability reduction plans that promote sustainable development. Municipal authorities can be introduced to the sustainable rehabilitation and recovery process, re-directing the focus from technical and conventional response actions towards incorporation of mitigation measures in disaster management plans, introducing proper land use planning and building regulations, protection of land and property rights, effective project management and improved governance, among other things, all within the framework of a longer-term reconstruction strategy. During the process, national professionals at different levels improve their technical and managerial skills and know-how; civil society and communities are empowered through their active participation in recovery efforts and development of a self-sustaining process; local small businesses, building contractors and organizations have the opportunity to grow and gain experience; and individuals, women in particular, can be trained in income-generating activities in the housing and infrastructure sector.

IV. Guiding principles for sustainable relief and reconstruction

30. The development of guiding principles will serve to articulate the basic practice philosophy that actors must adopt to ensure that relief and reconstruction assistance has a positive effect on the sustainable and equal development of human settlements in post-conflict and disaster environments. The principles will establish important baselines and priority areas of focus that are considered necessary for the implementation of truly sustainable relief and reconstruction activities.

31. In order for sustainable recovery to be achieved, a shift in thinking about relief and reconstruction and development is required at all levels. This conceptual change will have to be backed up with new operational approaches by international agencies, Governments and communities. Sustainable recovery in human settlements is a process. The guiding principles offer a realistic, forward-looking approach to

recovering from a crisis. They are also somewhat elastic, encompassing many different aspects of the process, and not every principle will be applicable in every recovery process. Giving serious consideration to these principles during planning and decision-making, however, can assist communities, authorities and support agencies to realize that decisions made during the earliest stages of recovery will have long-term impacts on the success and sustainability of recovery efforts.

32. Sustainable relief and reconstruction require:

(a) Establishment of permanent links between emergency relief and reconstruction and the transitional phase of development;

(b) Development of the capacities of local governments, as necessary, to operate as active partners in the process;

(c) Prioritization of the building and engaging of capacities of all actors at all levels from the earliest stages and throughout the process from relief and reconstruction to recovery and development;

(d) Utilization of participatory planning and inclusive decision-making models ensuring the involvement of all actors, women in particular, in all planning and implementation activities;

(e) Development of productive economic activities during the earliest stages of recovery to assist in the consolidation of peace and security;

(f) Facilitation of the security of affected populations as a critical precondition of any humanitarian or development activities;

(g) Development of broad-based and long-term reconstruction and shelter strategies from the earliest stages in order to ensure more effective use of emergency resources;

(h) Ensuring the protection of land and property rights of affected populations and development of longer-term solutions for land and property dispute resolution to reduce the potential for conflict;

(i) Incorporating vulnerability reduction and disaster management into existing national and local development and poverty reduction plans;

(j) Redirecting the focus to disaster risk reduction and mitigation rather than preparedness and response-related strategies in the human settlements context;

(k) Operating within a human rights framework, particularly in terms of land rights and security of tenure and the equal rights of women;

(l) The creation of strategic partnerships and alliances at all levels within the continuum from relief and reconstruction to development.

33. The present paper has benefited from discussions held at the second session of the World Urban Forum (Barcelona, Spain, September 2004). Using a set of twelve guiding principles underpinning the World Urban Forum background document entitled Sustainable relief in post-crisis situations: transforming disasters into opportunities for sustainable development in human settlements (HSP/WUF/2/10), participants in four separate sessions shared personal and institutional experiences as a basis for illustrating or suggesting modifications to the concept of sustainable relief and reconstruction, and further debated and reviewed the proposed guiding principles. The proposed principles were all agreed upon, with the following additional lessons learned:

(a) Decentralization of responsibility for prevention of and recovery from crises in human settlements is essential to ensure appropriate, balanced and sustainable vulnerability and risk reduction;

(b) Building a culture of prevention entails a cross-sectoral, multidimensional approach integrating participatory analysis of risk, implementation of programmes and development of policy and legal frameworks with all stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and local, national and international government, in a comprehensive process that takes gender into account;

(c) Effective peace building requires due attention to clear and understandable legal and regulatory frameworks, effective and impartial land and property administration, a functional interface between local government and its citizens in a dialogue that builds trust and commitment (with capacity-building where essential), a common vision and coordination of international actors;

(d) Understanding that crises, and conflicts, in particular, virtually always create displacement, implementation of sustainable strategies integrating rights-based approaches to shelter, tenure, and protection of the most vulnerable, are required in the earliest stages.

V. Way forward

34. In April 2004, UN-Habitat was invited to be a member of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. The Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs is one of the four committees created by the Secretary-General to enhance overall system-wide coordination within the United Nations. Convened monthly by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and composed of executives at the highest level, the Committee acts as an internal forum for the sharing of perspectives on humanitarian crises and issues. The Secretary-General is then informed and advised on the basis of the Committee's discussions. The human settlements component is integral both to humanitarian assistance and to long-term development. The added value of UN-Habitat to the activities of the humanitarian relief community are clearly its expertise in building on the short-term efforts of sister agencies to facilitate the longer-term development agenda while drawing key lessons and new methodologies from its experience.

35. The development of guidelines on sustainable relief and reconstruction is an important step in turning the discussions and debates into operational realities. In order to be truly effective, commitment to the guidelines and the direction of change that they represent must be sought from international agencies, local and national governments and civil society. Once commitment and consensus has been developed, it is vital that the guidelines be translated into action at all levels. National plans of action on disaster management have been or are being developed in many countries, and the guidelines should further inform the development of those plans.

36. The guiding principles will also support the development of a declaration on sustainable relief and reconstruction in human settlements. It is anticipated that the declaration will eventually constitute a global standard of human settlements recovery and development practice in post-crisis situations, and thus facilitate the creation of various instruments that would enhance operationalization of the guiding principles. UN-Habitat has a unique position in the United Nations system in terms of its long-standing commitment to sustainable human settlements development and, as such, it has a clear role in addressing and contributing to the provision of sustainable relief in the rehabilitation of housing, services and human settlements.

37. In an effort to develop a focused rapid response strategy for the agency, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat has recently established an internal working group on emergency response. In addition to elaborating a strategy, the working group is also in the process of identifying options for the establishment of a UN-Habitat rapid response unit for emergency response in the aftermath of a human-made or natural disasters.

38. The Governing Council is respectfully invited to discuss:

- (a) How UN-Habitat can become more effective in humanitarian situations;
 - (b) Whether the principles for the involvement of UN-Habitat in supporting human settlement in crisis proposed in document HSP/WUF/2/10 cover the issues of sustainable relief and reconstruction in human settlements sufficiently? Further review and debate is necessary;
 - (c) How the implementation of the guiding principles for sustainable relief and reconstruction can become an operational reality;
 - (d) How the guiding principles can be incorporated into national and local policies and actions;
 - (e) What the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in this process are and how those stakeholders can best be assisted.
-