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**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements
Programme (UN-Habitat), including coordination matters**

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

Addendum

**Report of the Executive Director on the third session of the
World Urban Forum**

Summary

The present report summarizes the issues addressed by the World Urban Forum at its third session, which was held in Vancouver, Canada, from 19 to 23 June 2006, and also its recommendations. The full proceedings of the session are contained in document HSP/GC/21/INF/2.

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Introduction

1. In its resolution 18/5 of February 2001, the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), inter alia, 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, which convenes 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, by 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 identification of synergies among development agencies in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Forum's reports and recommendations are submitted by the Executive Director to the Governing Council for its consideration and appropriate action. The full report of the third session of the World Urban Forum is contained in the annex to document HSP/GC/21/INF/2.
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 community-based organizations, including slum dwellers, women and youth groups; 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. Three sessions of the World Urban Forum have been held so far, in Nairobi (2002), Barcelona (2004) and Vancouver (2006). The reports of the first two sessions of the Forum were presented to the Governing Council at its previous sessions. In its resolution 20/10 of April 2005, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to report on the outcome of the third session of World Urban Forum to its twenty-first session. The resolution also requested the Executive Director to ensure that preparations for the third session of the Forum would provide maximum opportunities for sharing lessons learned, best practices and good policies in the field of shelter and sustainable urbanization.
6. Continuing the trend of rising interest in the World Urban Forum, the third session, held in Vancouver, attracted a total of 10,121 participants from 109 countries, making it one of the largest United Nations meetings held in the past two years. As was the case at the second session of the World Urban Forum, participation from the host country and other countries in the subregion was particularly strong. This provided additional justification for the decision to hold the World Urban Forum on a rotational basis as it encourages participants, who would not otherwise involve themselves in UN-Habitat forums, to join in debates. Participation was equally notable from outside of the North American region, however, with almost half of the top ten participating countries belonging to the developing world.
7. The increasing participation by countries is a very interesting trend, which reveals a growing awareness of and interest in the World Urban Forum as a vibrant market place of ideas. Just over half of the participants at the third session came from the host country. The other half comprised participants from 108 countries; the top ten countries in terms of numbers of participants are set out below in table 1. Despite the considerable distance and costs of travelling to Vancouver, participation from developing and least developing countries was significant. This was possible thanks in large part to the generous financial support offered by the Government of Canada. The Governments of Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and Trinidad and Tobago also provided financial support to ensure that the forum was inclusive and representative.

Table 1: Top ten participating countries

Country	Participants
Canada	5,187
United States of America	626
Mexico	183
South Africa	174
People's Republic of China	163
Kenya	156
Sweden	146
Brazil	138
India	130
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	124

8. The third session of the World Urban Forum contributed significantly to mainstreaming the urban agenda. Just as the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in Vancouver in 1976, placed local community concerns on the international agenda and highlighted the critical importance of sustainable human settlements, the Forum in Vancouver, 30 years later, lived up to its promise of moving ideas to action. It was best symbolized by its inclusiveness, with balanced participation from public, private and civil society sectors.

9. A rich and varied group of Habitat Agenda partners were represented at the Forum, which constituted an improvement in the quality and quantity of representation.

Table 2: Participation by partner type at the second and third sessions of the World Urban Forum

Participants by partner category	Attendance at third session		Attendance at second session	
	Number	Percentage of total	Number	Percentage of total
National/provincial/state governments	1,594	15.7	446	17.8
Local authorities	1,607	15.9	414	16.4
Non-governmental organizations/civil society	2,549	25.2	535	21.2
Private sector	1,353	13.4	203	8.0
Academia and research institutions	1,261	12.5	201	8.0
Media	340	3.4	51	2.0
United Nations/international organizations	383	3.8	196	7.7
Other participants	1,034	10.2	416	16.5
Total number of participants	10,121	100	4,389*	100.0*

* Including partner types not included in this list

10. The quest for innovative ideas and practical solutions was evident in the six dialogues, 13 roundtables discussions and more than 160 networking events that took place. Ministers, mayors, academics, community-based organizations, federations of non-governmental organizations and the private sector shared their insights and experiences on what would improve the quality of life in the world's growing cities. The inclusive approach adopted at the Forum itself constitutes a model for cities to follow. Some are already using this approach, while others would benefit from doing so.

11. Mr. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister, Government of Canada, made an opening address to the third session, which was chaired by Ms. Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, Canada, and co-chaired by Mr. John Magufuli, Minister of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements, Tanzania. Other distinguished personalities who made statements at the opening ceremony included Mr. Gordon Campbell, Premier, Province of British Columbia, Canada, Mr. Noli de Castro,

Vice President, Government of the Philippines, Mr. Charles Kelly, Commissioner General of the third session of the World Urban Forum, Mr. Ali Mohamed Shein, Vice President, Government of Tanzania and Mr. Sam Sullivan, Mayor of the City of Vancouver.

12. One of the most prominent achievements of the Forum was effectively to increase the level of involvement of participants in the different events. Building on lessons learned from the second session of the Forum, held in Barcelona, a number of changes were made to the overall structure of the third session. Dialogue sessions were redesigned to forego the traditional panel format, to limit the number of speakers and to enhance the level of participation from the audience in the form of extended question periods.

13. Roundtable discussions were also added to the programme in an effort to facilitate meetings among peers and the consideration of topics of special interest to the different stakeholders. In keeping with Governing Council resolution 20/10 on the World Urban Forum, which requested the Executive Director to ensure that the third session was “as inclusive as possible” so as to ensure “a fruitful and focused dialogue between Governments from all regions, local authorities and other Habitat Agenda Partners”, UN-Habitat made concerted efforts to increase the engagement and participation of Habitat Agenda partners in the preparatory process leading to the Forum.

14. This effort culminated in the balanced level of participation from different partners, including national governments (15.7 per cent), local authorities (15.9 per cent), academia and research institutions (12.5 per cent), and non-governmental organisations (25.2 per cent). It is worth noting that private sector participation rose from 8 per cent at the second session to 13.4 per cent at the third session of the Forum. Participation by gender was balanced with 51.8 per cent male and 48.2 per cent female. Local authority and national government representatives were equally balanced and together comprised 30 per cent of participants.

15. Great care was taken to ensure that the concerns of slum dwellers, youth, women and civil society and academics were integrated into the programme. Most notable also was the increased level of participation from the private sector, whose role as the builders and financiers of our towns and cities is of crucial importance. Youth involvement was also strengthened at the third session of the World Urban Forum. In the weekend preceding the Forum, over four hundred youth leaders from over forty countries assembled in Vancouver to share their experiences and strategies for urban development. Over three days, youth representatives were able to attend workshops and training sessions and discuss issues of relevance to youth in cities, as well as prepare for the Forum. Efforts will be made to intensify engagement with these key partner groups further at future events and to increase the participation of parliamentarians in particular.

16. Results of extensive evaluation surveys conducted by UN-Habitat shows that the third session of the Forum was undoubtedly a success with 93 per cent of respondents ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the ease of registration, 82 per cent ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with communications, and 90 per cent ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with logistics. 86 per cent of respondents felt that the forum significantly met their expectations in terms of relevance of topics and themes; 76 per cent felt that the organization of networks, dialogues, roundtables and special events significantly met their expectations; and 86 per cent said that the topics and themes were highly relevant to current global issues.

17. Further results of surveys conducted by the host country confirm that the Forum provided a strong platform to promote a new model of dialogue for the United Nations; a strong vehicle for engaging civil society and local authorities; and a global mechanism for raising the profile of UN-Habitat, the Millennium Development Goals and the challenges of global urbanization.

I. Funding of the third session of the World Urban Forum

18. Financial support provided by the Government of Canada was instrumental in ensuring the overall success of the third session of the World Urban Forum. Funding for travel to the Forum enabled 462 participants to make critical contributions to the Forum. Of that number, 384 participants were representatives of Habitat Agenda partners and had pivotal roles to play in the dialogues, networking and other special events. An additional 78 United Nations staff members travelled to the Forum, of whom, 57 UN-Habitat staff served as the conference secretariat and 21 United Nations security staff secured the venue.

19. Financial support was further leveraged in a number of ways. First, air travel of United Nations staff was undertaken in economy class so as to reduce the per-passenger cost, while ensuring that the conference was adequately staffed. Second, with regards to the travel of Habitat Agenda partners,

matching funds arrangements were agreed with the Environmental Youth Alliance and Slum Dwellers International whereby those organizations committed to mobilize an equal amount of funding to support the travel of additional participants. This is estimated to have allowed 85 participants to attend the session in addition to the 462 participants reported above. Other funds have been pledged but have not yet been received from the Governments of Spain, Sweden and Trinidad & Tobago to fund the travel of additional participants.

II. Press and media coverage at the third session

20. The Forum provided a platform for unparalleled media interest, in some cases continuing for several months after the event. Financial support provided for the preparation of background materials and brochures and information kits were particularly useful in generating awareness and particularly helped the media to convey the key themes of World Urban Forum to the public at large. There were over 400 journalists registered online, with over 200 participating at the conference. International television and radio agencies covered the conference and the substantive issues. For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation not only broadcast documentaries on the slum challenge but also broadcast daily reports from the session both on television and radio. The British Broadcasting Corporation ran a week of stories on the internet about the urban crisis, followed by daily dispatches on its World Service radio network. Deutsche Welle, Radio France International and Voice of America ran interviews with the participants. Television stations such as Kenya Broadcasting Corporation ran documentaries linking the session with substantive location footage.

21. The print media covered the session and the substantive issues on a regular basis. For example, the week of the conference began with front page stories and major spreads on cities and urbanization in, amongst others, all the major Canadian newspapers, the Financial Times and the Guardian (United Kingdom), Le Monde (France), El Pais (Spain) and Newsweek (United States of America). All the major press agencies, such as Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse and the Pan African News Agency carried stories about the session. Many articles were also published in the media from developing countries such as the Hindu and the Times of India (India), the Nation (Kenya) and the Citizen (Tanzania).

III. Outcomes of the third session

22. Participants to the Forum called for practical action to balance economic, environmental and social development objectives in the realization of sustainable urbanization. This call was reflected in three broad convergences of opinions, as follows.

(a) There was widespread agreement that all urban stakeholders, including citizens, local governments, state and provincial governments, national governments, the private sector and civil society organizations, should work harder together to solve urban problems and challenges. They all must do their part, rather than simply transfer responsibilities to others.

(b) There was a convergence of opinion around the idea that risk taking and the pursuit of innovation must characterize municipal leadership if cities are to achieve sustainable development. Vancouver's example in taking the lead in such areas as air and water quality, public transit and planning was often mentioned in this context.

(c) Participants agreed that transparency and accountability lies at the core of sustainable urbanization, so that citizens can be informed of challenges and steps taken by Governments to address them. Transparency goes hand-in-hand with accountability, speeds up the process of enhancing actions that work and curtails those that do not work.

23. The above convergences of opinion were translated into the following concrete ideas for action:

(a) **Coming to terms with the urban age.** A new message resonated from Vancouver: urban issues have become a major challenge of our time. The urban population of developing countries is set to double from 2 to 4 billion in the next 30 years. Ensuring that these people do not end up in slums requires the planning, financing and servicing of the equivalent of a new city of 1 million people every week during the same period. The investment required to plan for and provide decent shelter and basic services should be viewed as a major impetus for social and economic development.

(b) **From exclusion to engagement: all partners showed a willingness to build effective coalitions to address the needs of the urban poor.** The Forum witnessed a dramatic and fundamental shift in the willingness of Governments and local authorities to engage with all urban actors to improve

the quality of life of people, their communities and cities. In several keynote addresses and in various dialogues, government representatives showed a keen interest in being actively engaged with civil society organizations and their representatives and in supporting initiatives that improved their housing and access to basic services. Most Governments represented in Vancouver 2006 cited the need to engage with and support community initiatives to improve the living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable groups and to improve the urban environment. This willingness to be engaged with all urban actors and to drive the process of urban renewal and poverty alleviation reflects a change in government attitudes towards the need to move beyond participation to concepts such as inclusiveness, empowerment and active engagement with urban citizens.

(c) **Meeting the financing challenge of slum upgrading and sustainable infrastructure development.** The Forum recognized the critical need for increased financial resources to attain the slum upgrading target set out in the Millennium Declaration. It also recognized that the challenge is to shift from relying on international development finance to tapping local capital markets. In this context, the Forum acknowledged the need for international donors to play a catalytic role in building the capacity and improving the credit-worthiness of cities and to package such assistance with seed capital, as piloted by UN-Habitat's Slum Upgrading Facility, in line with paragraph 56 (m) of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which calls for investments in pro-poor housing and urban infrastructure.

(d) **Re-inventing planning: applying new paradigms for sustainable urban development.** The Forum placed a strong emphasis on planning as a tool for urban development and environmental management and as a means of preventing future slum growth. This view was accepted not just by government officials and urban planners themselves but also by civil society groups that wanted planning to be more inclusive, transparent and ethical. The Forum stressed the important role of planners as agents of change and underlined the importance of sustainability as the backbone of new forms of planning.

24. The strong participation of women and youth who represent a large proportion of people living in cities infused much valued energy into the deliberations. Future sessions of the Forum will adopt strategies that reflect the specific needs of youth and engage youth in decisions affecting their lives. The Forum recognized the numerous current investments and resource contributions to the sustainability of cities and communities made by women at the grassroots level. Also recognized was the fact that cities are largely the product of private investment – a fact underscored by the strong presence of the private sector and its active participation in the Forum.

25. These ideas have already influenced both the theme of the twenty-first session of the Governing Council and the UN-Habitat Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan for the period 2008–2013, which is before the Governing Council for review at its twenty-first session. The thematic focus areas of the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan, which are advocacy, monitoring and partnerships, participatory urban planning, management and governance, pro-poor land and housing, environmentally sound and affordable basic infrastructure and services, and strengthening human settlements finance systems, are designed in part to respond operationally to issues which arose from the third session of the World Urban Forum. Furthermore, from 2008, a central objective of the World Urban Forum will be to provide a forum for Habitat Agenda partners to report on their contributions to sustainable urbanization, including their work in the focus areas of the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan.

26. The success of the third session of the World Urban Forum lay not just in what was discussed but in what was learned. Participants were keen to share ideas, network and forge new alliances through both formal and informal meetings with partners and viewed the Forum not as a place where declarations and plans of action were endorsed but where experiences were shared.

27. The successes of the third session of the World Urban Forum include the identification of gaps and areas which require further and continuous attention, as follows.

(a) Some participants observed that the Millennium Development Goals are not having an impact on the ground in many countries. The commitments made by Governments at the Millennium Summit in 2000 and the adoption of national poverty reduction strategies in several countries have not necessarily resulted in improved living conditions among the urban poor. For instance, the increasing incidence of forced evictions is at odds with those Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing poverty. Participants felt that there was still a wide discrepancy between what Governments said and what they did and that this discrepancy needed to be addressed if the Millennium Development Goals were to be met in cities. UN-Habitat recognizes this discrepancy and the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan is designed to respond to the expectations of Governments and of the international community by building on UN-Habitat's comparative advantages.

(b) There was a convergence in approaches to sustainable urban development policies as both developed and developing countries seemed united in the view that sustainability and its link to poverty was a major challenge facing all cities. There was, however, recognition that each region faced particular challenges that were best addressed by a more systematic exchange of best practices and good urban policies among all stakeholders at the local, national and international levels.

28. The emerging issues and recommendations which were the outcome of the third session of the World Urban Forum have been taken into account in both the draft Medium-term Strategic Institutional Plan 2008-2013 and the theme paper, entitled “Sustainable urbanization: local action for urban poverty reduction with an emphasis on finance and planning”, both of which are before the Governing Council at its twenty-first session for review and consideration.
