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**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements  
Programme, including coordination matters**

## **Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

### **Report of the Executive Director**

#### **Addendum**

### **Report of the Executive Director on the fourth session of the World Urban Forum**

#### *Summary*

The present report summarizes the issues addressed by the World Urban Forum at its fourth session, which was held in Nanjing, China, from 3 to 6 November 2008, along with the recommendations adopted by the forum at that session. The full proceedings of the session are reproduced in document HSP/GC/22/INF/2.

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## **I. History of the World Urban Forum**

1. In its resolution 18/5 of February 2001, the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (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 for 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 the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on these issues.<sup>1</sup> To that end the Forum, which convenes every other year 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 strongly emphasizes 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 fourth session of the World Urban Forum is contained in the annex to document HSP/GC/22/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 group Global Parliamentarians on Habitat; non-governmental community-based organizations, including slum dweller, 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. Four sessions of the World Urban Forum have been held so far, in Nairobi (2002), Barcelona (2004), Vancouver (2006) and Nanjing (2008). The reports of the first three sessions of the Forum were presented to the Governing Council at its previous sessions.
6. The fourth session, held in Nanjing, attracted a total of 7,900 participants from 146 countries (see table 1 in the annex to the present note), making it one of the largest global United Nations meetings held in China since 1995. Of this figure, 3,600 participants came from abroad. As was the case with the Vancouver session, participation from the host country and from the region was particularly high. This provides further justification for the decision to hold the World Urban Forum on a regional rotational basis as it encourages participants from a given region, some of whom would not participate in the session were it held elsewhere, to join in the debate.
7. A rich and varied group of Habitat Agenda partners were represented at the Forum and there was a notable increase in participation by local government, academia and international organizations (see table 2 in the annex to the present note).

## **II. Theme and sub-themes**

8. The Fourth session of the Forum was held under the theme of "harmonious urbanization: the challenge of balanced territorial development". The Forum adopted the concept of harmonious urbanization as a theoretical framework to aid understanding of today's urban world and as an operational tool with which to confront the most important challenges facing the urbanization and development processes. The concept addresses national and local concerns by searching for solutions that integrate different levels of government. A harmonious city promotes unity within diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to the adoption of resolution 18/5 the United Nations General Assembly adopted its resolution 56/206 of 21 December 2001 on strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. By that resolution the General Assembly transformed the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) into the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and changed the Commission on Human Settlements into the Governing Council of the new Human Settlements Programme.

Harmony within cities hinges not only on prosperity and its attendant benefits but also on two pillars that make harmony possible: equity and sustainability.

9. The theme of the fourth session was supported by six sub-themes that provided the main focus for the four-day session: “territorial balance in urban development”; “promoting social equity and inclusiveness”; “making cities productive and equitable”; “harmonizing the built and natural environments”; and “a city for all generations”.

10. The quest for innovative ideas and practical solutions in respect of these themes was evident in the six dialogues, eight round-table discussions and more than 140 networking events and habitat seminars that took place in Nanjing. Ministers, mayors, academics, community-based organizations, federations of non-governmental organizations and members of 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 and in its discussions among all partners represents a model for cities. Some cities are already using such an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach, while others certainly would benefit from doing so.

11. The fourth session of the World Urban Forum opened with a welcoming ceremony followed by statements by dignitaries and key partners. The keynote address was delivered by Mr. Jiang Weixin, Minister for Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China and Chair of the session. The message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, was read on his behalf, by Mr. Sha Zukang, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. Mr. Qi Ji, Deputy Minister for Housing and Urban-Rural Development, China, served as master of ceremonies. Statements were also presented at the opening ceremony by the following dignitaries and partners: Mr. Jiang Hongkun, Mayor of Nanjing, China, Mr. Luo Zhi Jun, Governor of Jiangsu Province, China, Mr. Zhang Dejiang, Vice-Premier of the People’s Republic of China, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director UN-Habitat, Mr. Raila Odinga, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kenya, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Mr. Noli de Castro, Vice President, the Republic of the Philippines.

12. One of the most prominent achievements of the Forum at its fourth session was to build on the momentum of its third session and to allow for new modalities for partner involvement. Building on lessons learned in Vancouver a number of changes were made to the overall structure of the fourth session. A series entitled “Habitat seminars on urban innovations” was added to the programme in order to enhance opportunities for Habitat Agenda partners to showcase their work in “turning ideas into action”. Special sessions on housing finance and decent work, as advocated by the International Labour Office, were included in the programme in recognition of the importance of these topics for the current urban agenda.

13. Round-table discussions remained prominent components of the programme in an effort to continue facilitating meetings among peers and peer groups and to provide a platform for them to consider topics of special interest to the various stakeholders, in particular to the extent that they related to the theme of the Forum.

14. Youth involvement was strengthened at the Fourth session. In the days preceding the session over 500 hundred youth leaders from around the world assembled in Nanjing to share their experiences and strategies for urban development. Youth representatives were able to attend workshops and training sessions, discuss issues of relevance to youth in cities and prepare for the session itself. Youth activities before and during the session culminated with the launch of the Youth Opportunities Fund, an initiative of the Government of Norway.

### **III. Funding of the fourth session of the World Urban Forum**

15. Financial support provided by the Government of China and the city of Nanjing was instrumental in ensuring the overall success of the fourth session of the World Urban Forum. Funding provided for travel to the session enabled 350 participants, of whom over 200 were from least developed countries, to attend different events and make critical contributions to the session.

### **IV. Outcomes of the fourth session**

16. Participants in fourth session of the Forum recognized that the enormity of the challenge of rapid urbanization demands a higher degree of coordinated action than has been achieved to date. This recognition was reflected in six broad streams of converging opinion, which are listed below and further details of which are contained in document GC/22/INF/2:

(a) **Harmonious urbanization.** The theme of the fourth session of the World Urban Forum, harmonious urbanization, encompassed the environmental and economic cornerstones of sustainable development as well as the critical but often neglected human element. The idea as stated by many participants from around the world has always been to keep the individual at the centre of all urban policymaking. There is global consensus on the need to think of cities beyond their economic dimensions to encompass the more intangible dimensions of urban life. Thus it is recognized that urban development and city management initiatives should foster the collective identity of cities and emphasize memory and tradition in addition to economic functionality;

(b) **Centrality of partnerships and levels of engagement.** The Forum reiterated the importance of alliances and strategic partnerships. A key development during the session was the “higher-order” engagements of cities with local, regional and international actors. Based on synergies between different actors, these higher-order engagements go beyond the traditional scope of enabling policies and legislation. They are not confined to conventional compacts or agreements between, for example A local authority and the business community, or a local authority and trade unions. Rather, they consist of city-wide modelling and strategic planning exercises involving actors, actions and resources at different levels;

(c) **Affordable housing finance.** The Forum at its fourth session highlighted the fact that the provision of basic services and affordable housing was no longer just a sectoral objective but rather a strategic means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Governments and municipalities therefore must strengthen their cooperation in order to turn challenges into opportunities. The private sector and foreign investors must be welcomed as partners. Sustainable cities with affordable housing require the support of Governments and parliaments, and local communities must be brought into the decision-making process. Against the backdrop of the current global financial crisis, the need to mobilize sufficient funds to enable the billion poorest people in the world to gain access to affordable housing was underscored;

(d) **Cities and climate change.** The Forum stressed that no successful city in the modern world could afford to ignore the effects of climate change. Among the greatest stresses that climate change causes, besides the risk of increasingly violent tropical storms, are rising sea levels. Thus, harmonious urban growth must go hand in hand with disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction. Early warning and better surveillance systems are of paramount importance. It is vital to climate change mitigation that cities cut their waste output and emissions and consume less energy;

(e) **Gender and intergenerational issues.** The Forum underscored the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment and their importance to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It also noted that addressing gender issues in urban planning and management helped cities to become more socially and culturally inclusive. In particular, a call was made for all States to ensure that women's equal right to land, housing, property and secure tenure were respected and promoted. It was also made clear during the Forum that urban planning had to take into account the needs of all age groups, which required access for all generations to opportunities, services, shelter, welfare, and infrastructure;

(f) **Global economic crisis.** The fourth session of the Forum was held in the midst of a devastating global financial crisis rooted in a huge increase in mortgage defaults caused by poor quality underwriting and a sudden rise and fall in house prices. The deliberations during the session highlighted the lessons learned from this and similar financial crises in the past, along with possible solutions. The latter included strengthening global and national financial regulatory frameworks and improving the flow of financial information on government interventions. They also involved strengthening the financial literacy of borrowers, greater use of micro-finance for progressive home construction in developing country cities, and a review of the international financial architecture;

17. The high level of participation in the session by women and youth, who represent a large proportion of people living in cities, infused much valued energy into the deliberations. The Forum recognized the numerous current investments and resource contributions to the sustainability of cities and communities made by women at the community level. The Forum also recognized that cities are largely the outcome of private investment at both the corporate and household level, a fact underscored by the active participation of the private sector at the session.

18. For UN-Habitat's medium-term strategic and institutional plan, the World Urban Forum was a watershed that served to verify and give credence to the Plan's main pillars: the centrality of partnerships, advocacy, governance, affordable housing and services and strengthening housing finance systems for sustainable urbanization.

19. The success of the fourth 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 session not as an event where declarations and plans of action were endorsed but where experiences were shared.

## **V. Recommendations for future sessions**

20. Reflecting on past sessions of the World Urban Forum, a number of lessons have been learned and the following recommendations are set forth:

- (a) To include the World Urban Forum in the formal United Nations calendar of meetings in order to facilitate mobilization of resources, staffing of the secretariat and reporting guidelines;
- (b) To mobilize core budget funds for World Urban Forum preparations, in an effort to facilitate the substantive and organizational arrangements of the Forum and their focused alignment with UN-Habitat's medium-term strategic and institutional plan;
- (c) To ensure that the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the country hosting a given session of the Forum is done in a timely manner in order to facilitate all financial and organizational aspects of the process of preparing for the session;
- (d) To align the World Urban Forum with UN-Habitat's strategic plan and ensure its relevance to the work and policy goals of the United Nations and to maximize, among other things, the participation of United Nations bodies and programmes in the sessions of the Forum;
- (e) To maintain the momentum of the World Urban Forum through intersessional activities including preparatory committees at the national and regional level;
- (f) To increase the involvement of Habitat Agenda partners in preparations for sessions of the World Urban Forum by implementing a set of strategic activities that would enhance the integration of regional perspectives into the session agendas, support mobilization of resources and increase representation of partners from all regions at the sessions of the Forum;
- (g) To consider whether the sessions of the World Urban Forum might have an optimal size that would optimize the substantive and organizational quality of the sessions without compromising their inclusive nature.

## Annex

**Table 1: Top10 participating countries at the third and fourth sessions of the World Urban Forum**

Fourth session		Third session	
Country	Participants by percentage	Country	Participants by percentage
China	48.1	Canada	51.2
Kenya	3.5	United States of America	6.2
Nigeria	3.2	Mexico	1.8
Sweden	3.0	South Africa	1.7
United States of America	2.2	China	1.6
South Africa	2.0	Kenya	1.5
India	1.9	Sweden	1.4
Germany	1.8	Brazil	1.4
Canada	1.7	India	1.3
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1.6	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1.2
United Republic of Tanzania	1.6		
France	1.6		

**Table 2: Participation by partner categories at the third and fourth sessions of the World Urban Forum**

Partner category	Percentage of total attendance at fourth session	Percentage of total attendance at third session
National Governments	12.7	15.7
Local governments	23.1	15.9
Non-governmental organizations	12.0	25.2
Private sector enterprises	12.8	13.4
Academic bodies	14.6	12.5
Foundations	0.8	n/a
Media enterprises	2.3	3.4
Intergovernmental organizations	2.5	n/a
United Nations and other international organizations	5.8	3.8
Others	12.4	10.2