



UNITED  
NATIONS

**HSP**

**HSP/GC/23/2/Add.2**

**UN HABITAT**

**Governing Council  
of the United Nations Human  
Settlements Programme**

Distr. General  
20 December 2010

Original: English

---

**Twenty-third session**

Nairobi, 11–15 April 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**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 fifth session of the  
World Urban Forum**

*Summary*

The present report summarizes the issues discussed by the World Urban Forum at its fifth session, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 22 to 26 March 2010, along with the recommendations adopted by the Forum at that session. The full report of the fifth session is set out in document HSP/WUF/5/3, which has been reproduced for the Governing Council in document HSP/GC/23/INF/2.

---

\* HSP/GC/23/1.

## Introduction

1. The World Urban Forum has its genesis in resolution 18/5 of February 2001, in which the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, among other things, to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty to create 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 as an advisory mechanism to the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on those 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 experiences and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners. As an initiative in global civic engagement, the 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 in the development and management of cities.
3. A further function of the Forum is the identification of synergies between 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 possible action. The full report of the fifth session of the Forum is set out in document HSP/WUF/5/3, which has been reproduced for the Governing Council in document HSP/GC/23/INF/2.
4. Participation in the Forum is open to representatives of 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. Five sessions of the Forum have been held to date, in Nairobi (2002), Barcelona, Spain (2004), Vancouver, Canada (2006), Nanjing, China (2008) and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2010). The reports of the first four sessions of the Forum were presented to the Governing Council at its previous sessions.

## I. Attendance at the fifth session

6. The fifth session of the World Urban Forum, held from 22 to 26 March 2010, attracted a total of 13,795 participants from 150 countries (see the table in the annex to the present report), making it one of the largest global United Nations meetings ever held in Brazil. Of this figure, 6,413 participants came from the host country, which provides further justification for the decision to hold the Forum on a regional rotational basis, as it encourages participants from a given region, some of whom would not participate in sessions held elsewhere, to join in the debate. It also ensures that some challenges posed by urbanization that are peculiar to a region, in addition to best practices in tackling those challenges, are shared with the rest of the world.
7. A rich and varied group of Habitat Agenda partners attended the session and there was a notable increase in participation by local government, academic and international organizations. Additional information on attendance at and the conduct of the Forum can be found in the report of the fifth session (HSP/WUF/5/3).

## II. Themes and sub-themes

8. The fifth session was held under the theme "The right to the city: bridging the urban divide". As a natural progression from the fourth session, where it was concluded that urban poverty and exclusion were major factors militating against harmonious urban life, the right to the city as a legal and active participatory concept was considered to be a crucial element in bridging the urban divide.

---

1 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 UN-Habitat.

9. The theme of the session was underpinned by six sub-themes forming the six dialogues that provided the main focus for the session. Those themes were divided into 12 thematic open debates, a new feature of the Forum, which provided an opportunity over three days to enhance the substantive discussions.

10. In addition, 12 round-table discussions brought Habitat Agenda partners together in peer-group sessions to share experiences and views on the Forum's theme. A business caucus was held over two days and served as a major platform for the private sector to share best practices and innovations for sustainable cities. A total of 150 networking events, 7 special sessions, 2 seminars, 49 side events and 24 training events were held. Pursuant to Governing Council resolutions 22/7 and 22/4, a gender equality action assembly, comprising 15 separate meetings, and a world urban youth assembly, with a total of 14 meetings, were also held on 19 and 20 March, prior to the official opening of the Forum.

11. More than 110 displays from 35 countries were viewed by thousands of participants – a significant increase on the numbers attending previous Forum sessions. The exhibitors were as varied as the numerous interest groups present, including youth and women. On display were learning institutions showcasing study packages, Governments highlighting their best practices, big businesses exhibiting the latest in new technology, and non-governmental organizations – including grass-roots women's organizations – demonstrating innovation and creativity, and signalling a new dawn for a greener urban future and energy-saving technology.

### **III. New and strengthened partnerships**

12. The most distinctive issues emerging from the session were those related to the evolution of new forms of partnerships. The traditional nomenclature of the public, private and civil society sectors was deepened to reflect new modalities, tools and norms that were shared and fostered in the course of the week.

13. Stakeholders at various levels of governance, across constituencies and from every region, agreed that the Forum needed to have a stronger focus on making cities more sustainable. Action, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation became the rallying cry in much of the discussion. There was a need to capitalize on that momentum and to create a mechanism for follow-up on the recommendations by UN-Habitat, Governments and Habitat Agenda partners.

14. In many countries, the concept of the "right to the city" is relatively new and the Forum fostered rich discussion of the idea. One way of understanding the concept is not to define the city geographically or administratively, but rather as a space for citizenship with rights to use and ownership. Such understanding at the government, city and community levels can lead to strong and effective ways of bridging the urban divide. Through the use of terminologies and suggestions of new approaches, there was a valuable exploration of the concept of the right to the city across regions, constituencies and levels of governance.

15. A highlight of the session was the launch of the World Urban Campaign to take to a new level the drive by UN-Habitat and its Habitat Agenda partners for better, smarter, greener and more equitable cities. It also underscored one of the main objectives of UN-Habitat – to forge effective partnerships between and with the public, private and civil society sectors.

16. Another important highlight was a special session on improving the rebuilding initiative in Haiti following the earthquake that afflicted the country in January 2010, at which the Prime Minister of Haiti was in attendance and a special message from the former President of the United States of America and United Nations Special Envoy for Haiti, Mr. Bill Clinton, was delivered. UN-Habitat serves as the lead coordinator for housing, land and planning in Haiti. At the conclusion of the session, an international donors' conference on the theme "Towards a new future for Haiti", which the United States was co-hosting with the United Nations on 31 March 2010 in New York, was announced.

17. In addition, a special session was organized on South-South cooperation as called for by the Governing Council in its resolution 22/9 of 3 April 2009.

### **IV. Funding of the fifth session**

18. The success of the fifth session was made possible by the substantial funds contributed by the Government of Brazil and other regular donors. Those funds enabled UN-Habitat to sponsor the travel of nearly 400 participants, some 300 of whom were from the least developed countries. They attended and participated actively in various events, with some organizing their own events.

## **V. Outcomes of the fifth session**

19. At the session, three key new opportunities and partnerships were suggested: to build communities more sustainably; to restore security to housing markets; and to incorporate innovative and sustainable approaches into planning for disaster and offsetting climate change. It was acknowledged that the notions of sustainability and inclusiveness entailed recognition and positive harnessing of the role, energy and vibrancy of women, youth and children, key urban stakeholders who constituted the majority and deserved a stronger voice in society. Urban governance and participatory practices needed to pay special heed to the role and place of those actors. The spotlight was shone on a number of important living practices and attention was drawn to the need to scale up those practices. The role of knowledge, education, information and capacity-building was found to be paramount in bridging the urban divide. Universities and professional associations needed to connect more with local institutions and communities. New tools, insights and techniques would be required to bridge that divide and universities and professional associations were best positioned to provide them.
20. Participants underscored the urgent need to embrace a greener, more sustainable future for the world's metropolitan areas. Only such an approach could raise the standard of living for billions of people and allow them to gain access to health, education and basic services. It was also necessary for the promotion of democratic governance at the local level and to give specific expression to a rights-based approach to development. Lastly, it would help the world's people to become more responsible and discerning producers and consumers and overcome the challenges of climate change.

## **VI. Key messages and recommendations**

21. The debate on the main theme of the session produced a range of fresh and interesting ideas for policy and practice that enhanced the ideals outlined in the Habitat Agenda. High on the agenda were climate change and its potentially disastrous impact on cities, and the huge urban pollution footprint.
22. The key messages emerging from the Forum requiring follow-up and action may be summed up as follows:

### **A. Message 1**

23. The time has come to move beyond mere advocacy and commitment to the legal notion of the "right to the city". Greater effort needs to be directed towards putting in place appropriate legal and institutional frameworks together with the necessary investments to make the right to the city a reality. Practical efforts to give effect to this right must take due account of the social and cultural diversity that prevails in urban communities and use it to build the strength and vitality of those communities.

### **B. Message 2**

24. There is a need to conduct a thorough review and analysis of governance institutions. The prominence of cities in national landscapes, their changing social composition and the challenges confronting them all require institutional renewal, including changes in behaviour and political relations.
25. We can no longer carry on with our business as usual, which has resulted in unacceptable levels of social exclusion and deprivation. Heart-rending testimonials of homelessness, forced evictions and deprivation of the right to the city serve as stark reminders of the human and social costs of disenfranchisement.
26. Repeated calls were made for new and bold approaches to planning, new paradigms for service delivery and new business models for urban development accompanied by equally bold policy frameworks and leadership at the national and local levels.

### **C. Message 3**

27. Urban inequality is not limited to differences in income but includes a number of other important dimensions. Bridging the urban divide thus requires an integrated approach that articulates economic, social, political and cultural forms of inclusiveness. The Millennium Development Goals provide a useful framework for implementing a multidimensional approach to bridging the urban divide and for monitoring progress thereon. The three pillars of sustainability – social, economic and environmental – need to be strengthened with the cross-cutting dimensions of technology and governance.

## D. Message 4

28. In a world in which cities generate 80 per cent of all waste and 60 per cent of greenhouse gases, efforts to tackle urban poverty will help drive down those numbers. Making our cities more resilient and climate-proof requires better and more rational land-use planning, greener and more robust building codes and smart infrastructure and services. Such measures can best be achieved by harnessing the full potential of technology to reduce the ecological footprint of our cities while making our public infrastructure and services more accessible and more affordable.

29. Numerous meetings at the fifth session, including the launch of a global standard for measuring and reducing greenhouse gases in cities and the presentation of the winners of a new building re-skinning award, provided evidence of ways in which new technologies are making a difference. Such technologies, however, require governance structures capable of motivating and mobilizing people, communities, companies and public authorities to make investments that will not only save money in the future but will also demystify the technological divide.

30. In the mega-cities of Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America, markets have been opened to green technologies that can be employed to mitigate the effects of global warming, enabling billions of people to live in communities of choice, opportunity and hope. If well guided, the urbanization process can be an engine for economic and social development. Failure to manage urbanization effectively, however, will have a negative impact on the economy and global security alike, and will lead to social exclusion, increased poverty and a greater urban divide.

## E. Message 5

31. Stakeholders in urban poverty reduction must bear in mind that it is important to work with the poor rather than for them. Those living in poverty have the right to a say in decisions that affect their lives and the right to uplift themselves, in addition to the right to legal assistance in doing so. As is said in the refrain of a Brazilian samba by Antonio Carlos Jobim, “when the voice of the slum is heard, the whole city will sing!”.

32. UN-Habitat research unveiled at the Forum showed that every year over the past decade some 22 million people in developing countries have managed to move away from slums. While the target of the Millennium Development Goals relating to slum-dwellers has been surpassed, the total number of people living in slums around the world has increased from 776 million to 827 million over the past decade, which demonstrates the need for a new Millennium Development Goal target on slum-dwellers. Slums represent a violation of human rights. Helping slum-dwellers to reclaim their rights strengthens society as a whole and enhances the protection of our shared environment. Efforts to tackle the challenges posed by slums must also ensure equitable access to education and the safety of all citizens, especially women and youth.

33. Cities bring people, their ideas and their cultures together. Local authorities need the freedom to respond to the resulting challenges, backed up by better financing and better legislation, along with green building codes. Reducing urban pollution requires better public transport and wiser energy use, both of which are factors in the urban divide.

34. Social participation must become a pattern of democracy and justice that includes migrants alongside indigenous people. Governments should not wait for economic growth to take action to improve the lives of the urban poor. One of the simplest and least expensive things that any Government can do is to take care of its poorest citizens. Best practices from around the world were showcased at the session to enable countries to replicate successes and learn from international experience.

35. These measures all help in building the capacity of urban-dwellers to give increasing effect to their rights to the city. In bridging the urban divide, it is important that poor people are respected as active participants rather than passive recipients and are consulted on all matters pertaining to improving their lives. The right to the city must be enshrined in law, forged in gender rights and guided by civil society.

36. The UN-Habitat World Urban Campaign will advance the work of the international community in achieving these life-changing goals.

## Annex

### Participation by partner groups at the fifth session of the World Urban Forum

Partner groups	Number of participants	% of total
National governments	1 768	16.63
Universities and research institutions	1 688	15.87
Non-governmental organizations	1 666	15.67
Local governments and municipalities	1 293	12.16
Private sector	932	8.76
United Nations entities	472	4.44
Media	351	3.30
Foundations	248	2.33
Intergovernmental organizations	176	1.66
Parliamentarians	84	0.79
Others <sup>1</sup>	1 956	18.39
<b>Total number of participants at the fifth session of the Forum</b>	<b>10 634</b>	<b>100</b>
Workforce (logistics, volunteers, ground staff)	3 161	
<b>Total attendance at the fifth session of the Forum</b>	<b>13 795</b>	

---

<sup>1</sup> Partner category not specified at registration.