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HABITAT II PREPCOM II HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 27 APRIL 1995

Working Group I met in the morning to consider the report on the Secretariat's preparations for the Habitat II Conference, while a drafting group established Thursday morning from Working Group II began work on the preparation of the Draft Statement of Principles and Global Plan of Action.

WORKING GROUP I

The Secretary-General of the Conference reported on the Secretariat's activities in preparation for Habitat II as contained in document A/CONF.165/PC.2/2. Preparations at the national level have included dissemination of guides and working documents as well as briefings and advisory missions. As of February 1995, 79 countries had established national committees, and 52 had submitted progress reports. Regional and subregional preparatory meetings have been held in Africa, the Arab States, Asia, the Latin America and Caribbean states and Europe. Global and regional meetings of mayors, development banks, city associations, NGOs and professional associations were also held. The Secretariat also reported on host country preparations, such as NGO activities and the trade fair, and described the participatory design process for preparing the Draft Global Plan of Action.

Following the Secretary-General's Report, delegates made their observations.

PREPARATIONS FOR ISTANBUL: China noted that we are 13 months away from Istanbul and there is still a lot of work to be done. Ukraine said there is a need to have a draft agenda to facilitate national preparations towards Istanbul and proposed that the PrepCom should take a decision on it.

India requested additional information on the guidelines for participation in the trade fair in Istanbul. China urged host countries, particularly Turkey, to provide information on logistical preparations that are being undertaken to facilitate participation. Kenya said it has not begun to make arrangements for the trade fair for lack of information. She added that small firms may not be able to participate in the meeting since it is self-financed and suggested that discussions be held on the possibility of cross-financing.

In response, Turkey said registration and rules of procedure are the responsibility of the United Nations. Regarding the trade fair, an organizing company has been identified through a tendering process, and it will communicate with governments soon. A flyer providing details on the trade fair is available. The fair, located close to the Airport, plans to exhibit low cost products, services and technologies for low cost housing and

construction, including financing institutions. Fifteen percent of the exhibition grounds has been set aside for the Secretariat for allocation to the least developed countries and other UN agencies. Transportation from the conference halls to the trade fair has not been finalized.

Brazil noted the possible overlapping of the Dubai best practices meeting and regional preparatory meeting in Santiago, and asked the Secretariat to attend to the matter. The Secretariat replied that the Dubai meeting cannot be changed and the schedule for Santiago will likely change.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION: Delegations also raised concerns related to information dissemination. India pointed out that useful information from the Secretariat on country preparations is often not received or is received too late. He expressed surprise at the decision in paragraph 44 of A/CONF.165/PC.2/2/Add.1, Guidelines for national preparations, moving the deadline for submission of Summary Papers from 1 August 1995 to 1 March 1995. He suggested that the previously agreed date should be retained because it is too late for the March deadline and this information was received late. He also said it is essential to keep the national steering committees informed of relevant regional meetings.

The Philippines concurred and added that the Secretariat should provide governments with feedback on the relevance of the governments' work. China said more publicity on Habitat II should be done through the media and NGOs. He added that the preparations should be transparent and that all member States should be able to understand preparations at all stages, including those on the NGO conference. Ukraine said it received information late and not in Russian. He also lamented the fact that the PrepCom is not providing documentation in Russian. Sweden said that timelines for national preparatory processes should be taken into account when preparing timetables for activities relevant to Habitat II. Australia sought clarification on timetables for the progress reports and asked if the report due in September could serve as a final report. The Secretariat said September progress reports will help with final recommendations, but the final report deadline in December will not change.

Finland said that the awards system for best practices must be transparent and that information on Habitat II needs wide dissemination.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PREPARATIONS: India has set up a national steering committee and submitted two progress reports to the Secretariat. Kenya has: set up a national steering committee; prepared a work programme; held several workshops; documented best practices; and undertaken initiatives to prepare a report and formulate policy. She stressed

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the need for Habitat II to synchronize the two programmes on indicators so that governments do not have to repeat the same exercise. Sweden has established a national committee and submitted a progress report to the Secretariat.

Ukraine has set up a national committee, and a plan of action has been prepared and approved by the Government. National preparations in Hungary include a national committee, a professional advisory committee and a national report, which will contain a section of personal recollections from Habitat I. Finland has established a national committee and is developing its national report, a plan of action and an urban policy paper. Finland also has an ongoing national competition on best practices, a public awareness campaign and project to help women participate in Habitat II. Sudan created a national preparatory committee including 26 ministers to insure participation at the local level.

Regional activities in Eastern Europe have included a recent seminar on indicators hosted by the UNCHS information office in Budapest and an upcoming meeting of ministers for countries with economies in transition. Regional preparatory activities in the European region were also reported.

FUNDING: Delegates highlighted funding concerns. India raised several issues related to the Report. The Secretariat is silent on use of resources already mobilized that are reported in paragraph 6 and 34 of the Secretary-General's Report. Although PrepCom I decided that half of the resources mobilized for in-country preparations would be disbursed equally among developing countries, India has not received any funding, even after submitting a detailed justification. Kenya raised a similar concern. Hungary noted that preparatory activities have been delayed in its region because many countries lack the financial basis for evaluations and reporting. Sudan expects to launch an awareness program, build a data base, develop an in-country strategy, and prepare a national progress report but needs more resources. Uganda said that recent promises for financial assistance mechanisms and for assistance to women participants have not materialized.

India also stated that it was unaware of the allocation of funds to support the documentation of best practices reported in paragraph 25 of the Report. He hoped India would still be able to get funding for having undertaken the process. China said the Secretariat should actively seek funds to support the full participation of developing countries in the entire process.

RELATIONSHIP WITH NGOS: The UK sought clarification on modalities for participation by NGOs and other sectors in the official meetings in view of the location of the NGO forum. China said that although the role of NGOs and other sectors is important, the input of the government should be central and they should play the leading role.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES: Kenya called for a process to integrate gender aspects into the preparations. China said the PrepCom should use the experiences of UN conferences held since 1992 and make use of their positive aspects.

The Secretariat noted that many of the questions concerned information distribution. He said an information sheet will be distributed tomorrow with an overview, a timetable and a list of parallel and public events during Habitat II. For delegations stating that they did not receive information on best practices, or received it in an untimely fashion, he explained that documents are usually distributed through each country's permanent representative in Nairobi, who is responsible for distribution in the home country. He added that the timetable for national reports will be discussed during this PrepCom.

WORKING GROUP II

A drafting group of the Informal Working Group on the Draft Statement of Principles and Global Plan of Action (GPA) held closed-door discussions all day. The Group comprises representatives from regional and interest groups: Germany

(EU), Poland and Hungary (Eastern Europe), Sudan (Arab States), US and Finland (WEOG), Brazil and Cuba (GRULAC), Kenya and Senegal (Africa), The Philippines and China (Asia), Pakistan (G-77), United Kingdom (Local Authorities) and two Habitat International Coalition NGOs from the Netherlands and Tanzania.

The discussions were generally of a procedural nature although consideration was given to the structure and content of the draft plan of action. There was also discussion on whether to use the Secretariat document or the EU draft submitted Tuesday as a basis for preparing the text. There were positive views expressed regarding the EU draft.

COMMISSION ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

COMMITTEE II: The Committee resumed its consideration of the right to housing under Agenda Item 4, Activities of the UNCHS. The informal consultative group chaired by the Philippines introduced a revised draft resolution. The draft takes note of the UNCHS report "Towards a Housing Rights Strategy: Practical Contributions by UNCHS (Habitat) on Promoting, Ensuring and Protecting the Full Realization of the Human Right to Adequate Housing", and requests the Executive Director to examine and update the report. The Executive Director is to consider the legal, social, economic, political and practical aspects, and the concerns expressed by some member states including those regarding the existence and/or the legal status of the right to adequate housing. The Executive Director would report to the next Commission meeting. The draft resolution was adopted by the Committee.

The US introduced a series of revisions that would change or remove references to the right to housing from a number of documents; HS/C/15/2, HS/C/15/2/Add.1, HS/C/15/3, HS/C/15/3/Add.1, HS/C/15/3/Add.5, HS/C/15/7, HS/C/15/11 and HS/C/15/12. The US does not want to send documents to other meetings that reference a human right to adequate housing when the meaning is not clear. The US does not believe that the right to housing exists in international law as a separate human right. Documents referring to that right were a misrepresentation of facts that needed correction. The Russian Federation, supported by Sweden and Mexico, suggested placing an addendum in relevant documents noting the reservations of some delegations. The Netherlands said other fora would clarify uncertainties regarding the right to housing, so the references should remain. Canada, supported by Uganda and India, suggested adding text noting that the right to housing is an aspiration and a goal but not a legally binding concept. If its revisions are unacceptable, the US said it might accept the Russian or Canadian proposal. The Chair appointed an open-ended working party, chaired by Brazil and including the US, Uganda, India, Romania and Canada, to develop a proposal on the revisions.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

WORKING GROUP I: The Group will have an afternoon session to continue consideration of Agenda Item 2, preparations for the Conference. The Group is also likely to begin consideration of Agenda Item 4, state of human settlements report and major reviews.

WORKING GROUP II: The informal working group will meet Friday morning to hear a report on the progress of the drafting group, after which the full Working Group will meet for a report from the informal working group. It is likely the drafting group will reconvene thereafter.

AFRICAN DRAFT: The African Group has completed its draft proposal for the GPA. Look for copies of the document.

COMMISSION ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS: The two Committees of the Commission will meet Friday. Committee II will resume consideration of the right to housing.