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PREPCOM III FOR THE SECOND UN CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS: 5 - 17 FEBRUARY 1996

The third session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom III) for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), meeting at UN Headquarters in New York from 5-17 February 1996, will continue preparations for Habitat II, which will meet from 3-14 June 1996, in Istanbul, Turkey. Outstanding organizational issues to be addressed include accreditation of NGOs and local authorities. The Draft Statement of Principles and Commitments and the Global Plan of Action (GPA) were discussed during PrepCom II and an intersessional drafting group, but negotiations on the texts will commence on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis at PrepCom III.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HABITAT II

The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3-14 June 1996 — the 20th anniversary of the first Habitat Conference in Vancouver. The Secretary-General of the Conference is Dr. Wally N'Dow.

The objectives for Habitat II are: (1) in the long term, to arrest the deterioration of global human settlement conditions and ultimately create the conditions for achieving improvements in the living environment of all people on a sustainable basis, with special attention to the needs and contributions of women and vulnerable social groups whose quality of life and participation in development have been hampered by exclusion and inequality, affecting the poor in general; and (2) to adopt a general statement of principles and commitments and formulate a related Global Plan of Action capable of guiding national and international efforts through the first two decades of the next century.

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION

The organizational session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for Habitat II was held at UN Headquarters in New York from 3-5 March 1993. Delegates elected the Bureau and took several basic decisions regarding the organization and timing of the process. Martti Lujanen (Finland) was elected PrepCom Chair.

PREPCOM I

The first substantive session of the PrepCom was held in Geneva from 11-22 April 1994. Delegates agreed that the

overriding objective of the Conference should be to increase world awareness of the problems and potentials of human settlements as important inputs to social progress and economic growth and to commit the world's leaders to making cities, towns and villages healthy, safe, just and sustainable. The PrepCom also took decisions on the organization of the Conference and financing, national and international objectives, participation, the draft Statement of Principles and Commitments and the draft Global Plan of Action.

Regarding national objectives, delegates agreed that each participating country should design, adopt and implement a national plan of action, which will address the issue of human settlements in both urban and rural areas, taking into consideration environmental issues, and which will involve the full participation and support of the public and private sectors, and non-governmental and community-based organizations. Countries should also strengthen the capacity of institutions at all levels to monitor shelter conditions and urbanization processes using a minimum set of substantially uniform and consistent indicators.

Regarding international objectives, delegates agreed that the preparatory process should: present a "State of Human Settlements" report; produce a Statement of Principles and Commitments based on a new international consensus on policies and goals for shelter; produce a Global Plan of Action to mobilize international resources and create institutional arrangements to assist countries to implement and monitor the goals of sustainable human settlements and shelter for all and to protect the environment against unwarranted and undesirable impacts of urbanization; and make available the broadest range of information concerning shelter strategies, technologies, resources, experience, expertise and sources of support.

Regarding participation, delegates agreed that governments of participating States should establish national committees with broad participation from all levels of government, civic leaders, the academic and scientific community, grassroots leaders, non-governmental and community-based organizations, and the private sector. These committees should formulate, adopt and implement a work programme that includes the production of a national report, discussion on priority issues, organization of local and country consultations and forums, and preparation and presentation of audio-visual documentaries of examples of best practice in human settlement development.

Delegates agreed that the Draft Statement of Principles and Commitments should reaffirm and be framed within the general goals of the UN, contain a reference to the Principles adopted by Habitat I as well as the Rio Declaration, and introduce the rationale

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for the new principles and commitments that will guide national and international action on human settlements for the next 20 years.

Delegates agreed that the Draft Global Plan of Action should be structured around the two main themes of the Conference: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. The following multi-sectoral issues should be considered: settlements management; poverty reduction; environmental management; and disaster mitigation, relief and reconstruction. Cross-sectoral issues that should be considered include: women, the urban economy and employment; social and economic dimensions of urbanization and shelter development; education and capacity building; and equity and vulnerable social groups.

PREPCOM II

The second session of the PrepCom met in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24 April - 5 May 1995. The Committee considered organizational matters for PrepCom III and the Conference itself; prepared the first part of the draft Statement of Principles and Commitments and the Global Plan of Action; and prepared draft decisions for consideration by the 50th General Assembly.

Working Group I, chaired by Pamela Mboya (Kenya), considered preparations for the Conference and the status of human settlements reports and major reviews. Delegates agreed that a two-day pre-Conference consultation will be held in Istanbul to deal with organizational matters. During the Conference, one Plenary and two Main Committees are planned. The Plenary will have a general debate on the main themes of the Conference and a high-level segment. Committee I will prepare the Statement of Principles and the Global Plan of Action and Committee II will conduct hearings between Member States and participants from other sectors, and possibly receive recommendations on thematic issues from roundtables. During the Working Group's discussion of the rules of procedure, the issue of the participation of local authorities came under scrutiny.

Working Group II, chaired by Amb. H.L. de Silva (Sri Lanka), began work on the Draft Statement of Principles and Commitments and the Global Plan of Action. The draft GPA contained the following sections: a preamble, principles, goals and commitments, and strategies for implementation. The PrepCom made some progress on the first three parts of the document, but delegates acknowledged that a significant amount of work remained. To facilitate negotiations, delegates decided to continue drafting during the intersessional period in an informal manner through an open-ended drafting group.

INTERSESSIONAL DRAFTING GROUP

The 17-member Informal Drafting Group (IDG), which was charged with preparing the documentation for PrepCom III, met twice. The first meeting was from 17-21 July 1995 in Nairobi. The IDG included 13 governmental members, one local government representative and two NGO representatives.

The main task of the IDG at its first session was to make a draft of the fourth part of the GPA, which deals with strategies for implementation. As a result of the work of the IDG, Part IV now consists of the following chapters: 1. Adequate Shelter for All; 2. Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanizing World; 3. Capacity Building and Institutional Development; 4. International Cooperation and Coordination; and 5. Tracking Progress and Impact Evaluation. Following this meeting, the draft GPA was circulated to all UN Member States, international agencies, NGO networks and others with a request to submit comments and proposals for amendments to the Secretariat. The Secretariat received about 70 reactions, containing hundreds of amendments. The Secretariat circulated these to all governments and used them to draft a new version of the GPA.

The second meeting of the IDG took place in Paris from 9-14 October 1995. Delegates reviewed the revised draft text submitted by the Secretariat. While delegates made a great deal of progress on the text, a number of matters were deferred to PrepCom III, including the Principle that deals with the family. On some points, the IDG did not submit a draft text to PrepCom III. These points include: dealing with international financial assistance; housing rights; and the institutional follow-up.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGHLIGHTS

On 13 November 1995, Dr. Wally N'Dow briefed General Assembly (GA) delegates about the upcoming conference. The Habitat II Coordinator for the Host Country, Mr. Gürel Tüzün, also briefed delegates regarding preparations for the UN Conference, NGO Forum and International Trade Fair, all of which will meet simultaneously. The Second Committee of the UN General Assembly addressed Habitat II on 15 November 1995. Dr. N'Dow expressed his hope that the GA would support the PrepCom recommendation to encourage participation of local authorities at Habitat II. He also stressed additional financial support for the preparatory activities of the Secretariat. Twenty-three States spoke in the ensuing debate.

The resolution adopted by the GA endorses the report of PrepCom II. It sets the dates for PrepCom III and asks the Secretary-General to make provisions, within existing resources, for PrepCom III to establish two working groups in addition to the plenary meetings. The resolution also: reaffirms that the Conference should be held at the highest possible level of participation; expresses appreciation to those States and organizations that have made or pledged financial or other contributions in support of the preparatory activities for the Conference; requests the Secretary-General of the Conference to continue to make every effort to raise extrabudgetary resources for Conference activities and preparations; renews its appeal to all governments to make contributions to the voluntary fund; and encourages all relevant NGOs to participate in and contribute to the Conference and its preparatory process.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary will meet during a morning session in Conference Room 2. After adoption of the Agenda and accreditation of NGOs and local authorities, the Plenary is expected to form two working groups.

WORKING GROUP I: Working Group I is expected to address matters concerning the Conference itself and its organization (Agenda Item 3). The Group is expected to meet for an afternoon session in Conference Room 2.

WORKING GROUP II: Working Group II is expected to convene an official session at noon to organize its work. The Bureau has recommended that Working Group II divide into two subgroups: one to address paragraphs 1-22 (Habitat Agenda) and the other to address paragraphs 23 to the end (Commitments and Global Plan of Action).

IISD PANEL: The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) will host a panel on "Encouraging Community Lessons from Citizens' Initiatives" in Conference Room 9 from 1:30-2:30 p.m.

IN THE CORRIDORS: Some delegations have stated that their positions on the issue of a human right to adequate housing were misunderstood at Prepcom II in Nairobi. Debate over this issue resulted in lengthy legal arguments, and delegations will likely make an effort to clarify their positions at this meeting. The US plans to distribute a position paper on adequate shelter for all. The EU may also submit a proposal on the issue.