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SECOND UN CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II) HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 3 JUNE 1996

The Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) commenced with a morning Plenary meeting. Delegates met in the afternoon to hear general statements in the Plenary, and discussed the organization of work in Committees I (Habitat Agenda) and II (role of partners).

OPENING PLENARY

UN Secretary-General BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI opened Habitat II and noted that the recent series of UN conferences have shaped an agenda for development and are crucial for the determination of the future of life on the planet. Innovative aspects of Habitat II include the range of partners that have been included in the process and the Best Practices initiative, which demonstrates the capacity of human beings to rise to the challenge to renew our societies.

The Conference then elected SÜLEYMAN DEMIREL, President of Turkey, as President of the Conference. He stated that the Habitat Conference will generate innovative strategies that reinforce the importance of human development within the larger sustainable development agenda. We cannot afford to let the remarkable achievements of preceding conferences fail due to political and financial obstacles. Habitat II is an all-encompassing conference on humankind, and as the last of the UN conferences of this century, it must incorporate and supplement the successes of prior meetings to achieve a better quality of life for all in the 21st century.

Delegates then adopted the rules of procedure (A/CONF.165/2) and the agenda and other organizational matters (A/CONF.165/1). Representatives from the following countries were elected as Vice-Presidents: Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe, China, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, El Salvador, Jamaica, Peru, France, Germany, Greece, Sweden, the US, the UK, Bulgaria, Romania and the Russian Federation.

Emre Gönensay, Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, was elected Vice-President *ex officio* and Ricardo Gorosito (Uruguay) Rapporteur-General. Shafqat Kakakhel (Pakistan) was elected to chair Committee I (Habitat Agenda) and Martti Lujanen (Finland) to chair Committee II (role of partners). The Credentials Committee will include: China, Luxembourg, Mali,

the Marshall Islands, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the US and Venezuela.

Delegates agreed to the pre-conference consultations' recommendations regarding accreditation of international associations of local authorities (A/CONF.165/6 and Add.1) and NGOs (A/CONF.165/5 and Add. 1 and 2). GREECE noted reservations to the accreditation of the West Thrace Turks and TURKEY noted reservations to the non-accreditation of three Turkish Cypriot organizations.

Delegates then began the general exchange of views, focusing on the state of human settlements, including strategies for their implementation. After expressing his gratitude to the city of Istanbul, its leaders and all involved in the preparatory process, Secretary-General of the Conference WALLY N'DOW highlighted the importance of Habitat II in forging new pathways for the future of humanity. The great task that lies before us is to shine the spotlight of awareness and commitment wherever people exist in the shadow of despair. A new global contract for building sustainable societies is being constructed and must reflect the context of increasing globalization and the importance of non-state actors. Many issues considered in Istanbul are most relevant at the local level, so partnerships between governments and local authorities and other non-state actors are essential for effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The hearings of Committee II provide an unprecedented platform for these actors. The Best Practices initiative provides a unique opportunity to share successful strategies that will help bring about the commitments needed to resolve human settlements problems.

COSTA RICA, on behalf of the G-77/China, stated that the eradication of homelessness must receive the highest priority and Habitat II should consolidate the right to housing. The G-77/China will submit a proposal for an Istanbul Declaration. Habitat II must strengthen the existing mechanisms for coordination among nations, including the UNCHS. In addition, substantial financial resources should be mobilized.

ITALY, on behalf of the EU, noted that the primary arena for action is the local level. He stated that a summarized document could be considered. He called for increased attention to the needs of people living in poverty. He stressed the importance of rural and urban linkages and stated that national and international follow-up should be complementary. On behalf of Italy, he noted that land planning policies would be reviewed and that they are preparing Rome for the jubilee in 2000.

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On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, COLOMBIA stated that the right to housing should be a fundamental principle of the Habitat Agenda, because it is a fundamental human right. While action and policy implementation at the national level is most important, a concerted international effort is also needed, which can be advanced by creating a favorable international economic environment. Developed countries are called upon to assist developing countries by providing new and additional financial resources, technical assistance and information on available technology. The non-aligned countries affirm their commitment to full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to working within a framework of broad participation.

TURKEY stated that adequate shelter is integral to the right to an adequate standard of living. Turkey has implemented successful initiatives to keep pace with the growing demand for housing. The construction and building materials sectors have been developed significantly and financed effectively. Improving administrative support and investing in infrastructure for medium-sized cities have become policy priorities to counter the exodus from rural to urban areas. The Turkish government places particular importance on the education of children so the next generation will have a greater appreciation of environmental problems. Turkey is part of a wide-reaching regional initiative that is cooperating to develop strategies for human settlements and urban areas.

The US stated that Habitat II must continue to emphasize the sustainable development process that the world embraced in Rio. He stressed the definition of sustainable development used in Copenhagen at the World Summit for Social Development, which included economic growth, environmental protection and social development. He reaffirmed that the existence of a right to adequate housing is a component of existing rights.

CHINA stated that access to adequate housing is the most fundamental of all human rights. Economic growth and poverty eradication are key to solving human settlements problems. Governments at all levels should harmonize efforts to integrate the environment, human settlements development and population growth. Rural and urban areas should be given equal emphasis in human settlements development. Effective international cooperation is essential to solving human settlements problems and the UN must play a significant role in its coordination. China's urban development policy consists of strategies to control the size of large cities, actively improve small and medium-sized cities and improve countryside settlements.

COMMITTEE I

Committee I, chaired by Shafqat Kakakhel (Pakistan), held its first meeting in the afternoon. The session opened with a short video presentation by the Conference Secretariat. The Chair stated his conviction that while there are differences over the content of the document, these are not unbridgeable given a spirit of accommodation. At Turkey's request, he postponed the election of vice-chairs and the rapporteur until Tuesday, to allow further consultations on nominations.

The Chair proceeded to Item 9, the Adoption of the Habitat Agenda: Goals and Principles, Commitments and Global Plan of Action (A/CONF.165/9) and explained that the Committee should complete its work before Monday, 10 June. He listed the relevant documents: A/CONF.165/9 and Add. 1 and 2; A/CONF.165/L.1 and Corr. 1 and Add. 1 and 2; and A/CONF.165/CRP.1. He suggested that agreed text be adopted by Committee I on 11 June.

The US reminded the Chair that agreement had been reached at PrepCom III to circulate a compendium of NGO suggestions in Istanbul. The Chair noted that NGOs have produced an NGO compilation document that is available to delegations.

Two working groups were established. One will consider outstanding text in Sections E (international cooperation) and F (assessing progress) of the draft Global Plan of Action. The other group, chaired by Kakakhel, will consider the rest of the draft Habitat Agenda.

Responding to a number of requests for clarification regarding NGO participation, the Chair explained that NGOs will have an opportunity to make comments during official meetings, subject to conditions, but cannot take the floor during informal sessions. He said when it comes to the "ping pong" exchanges between delegations, NGOs will not be involved.

The Chair confirmed that a broad consensus has been reached on the need for an "Istanbul Declaration." Two drafts, prepared by Turkey and the G-77/China, are already available for discussion, and a third is in preparation. Discussion will move from informal consultations to an open-ended group. The US asked for a structured invitation to NGOs to address the Committee.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Some participants expressed surprise at the recent proposal for an Istanbul Declaration. They commented that a Declaration at this point in the negotiations would not set the tone but rather follow the lead of the text, as did the Beijing Declaration. Some have suggested that a summary of the Habitat Agenda would be useful, particularly for conveying the message of Habitat II to the public. Others argue that a Declaration is not the way to convey the message. They say the Principles section of the Habitat Agenda contains the type of language typical of a Declaration, so that in some ways, a Declaration already exists. A few proposals are being circulated. They are reported to be compatible, and negotiations are expected to be conducted informally, given the limited translation time budgeted for the Conference.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary is expected to meet during the morning and afternoon in the Plenary Hall to continue hearing statements on the state of human settlements.

COMMITTEE I: The Committee will meet at 10:00 am in Conference Room 1. Delegates are expected to elect the Bureau and the Chair of Working Group II, following which delegates will break into two working groups. Working Group I will continue in Conference Room 1 and Working Group II will meet in Conference Room 3 (Lutfi Kirdar Conference Centre).

COMMITTEE II: The Committee will meet all day in Conference Room 2 for a Local Authorities Hearing. Topics to be addressed are: local authorities as partners in implementing the Habitat Agenda; local Agenda 21s; democratization and decentralization; modernization and application of technology; and unified local authorities and the UN as partners.

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