



## UN-HABITAT GC-20 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 4 APRIL 2005

Delegates to the 20th session of the Governing Council (GC-20) to UN-HABITAT met in a morning plenary to hear welcoming and opening statements. In the afternoon, the high-level segment addressed: activities of UN-HABITAT; implementing and monitoring the goal of the UN Millennium Declaration on improving the lives of slum dwellers; work programme and budget for the biennium of 2006-2007; and coordination with other UN agencies. The Committee of the Whole (COW) met in the afternoon to discuss involvement of civil society in improving local governance.

### OPENING PLENARY

Bo Göransson (Sweden), President of GC-19, welcomed delegates to GC-20, noting that the world finds itself in mourning over the recent demise of His Holiness John Paul II. After a tribute to the Pope read by Anna Tibaijuka, UN-HABITAT Executive Director, delegates observed a minute of silence.

Tibaijuka delivered a message from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He underscored the importance of keeping the promise of improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, and acknowledged the leading role of UN-HABITAT in tackling this challenge. He also encouraged GC-20 delegates to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation when considering the UN-HABITAT budget for the biennium 2006-2007.

Speaking on behalf of the UN Office at Nairobi (UNON) staff, Paul Okwaro, President of the UN Nairobi Staff Union, reiterated UNON staff's resolve to implement decisions taken at this and other GC sessions.

Wangari Maathai, 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate and Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources of Kenya, highlighted UN-HABITAT's endeavors to confront challenges of environmental degradation in human settlements. Emphasizing the growing problem of "environmental refugees," she called for the protection of both built-up and natural environments through promoting individual and collective responsibility, and for UN-HABITAT to catalyze efforts by governments, local authorities, and civil society in order to provide adequate shelter for all.

Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), reported on the cooperation between UNEP and UN-HABITAT on urban environment, as a central issue for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He highlighted the link between sustainable cities and climate change, the importance of a gender-based approach, and the theme of this year's World Environment Day, "Green Cities."

Tibaijuka stressed that poverty and slums are central to the Millennium Declaration. She criticized the current MDG Target

11 on improving the lives of at least 100 million of slum dwellers by 2020 as modest in absolute numbers, and lacking country benchmarks, and urged, as the key outcome of the GC meeting, to reset it as "halve, between 1990 and 2020, the proportion of slum dwellers in the urban population." Reporting on the integration of the MDGs into UN-HABITAT's work on slums, water and sanitation, she called for UN-HABITAT to closely follow-up on the policy recommendations of the 13th session of the Commission for Sustainable Development.

Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, addressed the meeting, recalling his recent participation in UNEP's Governing Council, and noting that Kenya is privileged to host both UNEP and UN-HABITAT. He described how calamities such as the Indian Ocean tsunami have caused immense suffering and impacted on the sustainable development of human settlements. He noted that disaster preparedness at the community level is a theme of GC-20. He described Kenya's cooperation with UN-HABITAT through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2003, with a programme for upgrading slums in Nairobi. He also commended UN-HABITAT for strengthening UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation by establishing a special fund called Slum Upgrading Facility.

**ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS:** Delegates elected Ambassador Petr Kopriva, the Czech Republic, as GC President by acclamation. They also elected Rosalinda Valenton Tirona (the Philippines), Jose Luis Casal (Argentina) and Bernd Braun (Germany) as Vice-Presidents, and Edna Tobi (Nigeria) as Rapporteur. Delegates adopted the provisional agenda and the organization of work (HSP/GC/20/1 and Add.1). President Kopriva said that a drafting committee was established to consider draft decisions.

### HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

President Kopriva invited Tibaijuka to introduce agenda items to be addressed by the high-level segment: activities of UN-HABITAT; implementing and monitoring the goal of the UN Millennium Declaration on improving the lives of slum dwellers; work programme and budget for the biennium of 2006-2007; and coordination with other UN agencies. Tibaijuka presented the progress report of the Executive Director: "Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme" (HSP/GC/20/2). She then discussed the following: the second session of the World Urban Forum (HSP/GC/20/2/Add.1, Add.2); progress in the implementation of the Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People (HSP/GC/20/2/Add.3); and the Global Report on Human Settlements 2005 (HSP/GC/20/2/Add.4).

Highlighting its long-standing involvement in, and support to, UN-HABITAT, CANADA said its great value was inclusiveness,



and stressed the importance of finding innovative solutions in order to secure the future of cities and well-being of citizens. He also invited delegates to the World Urban Forum III, to be held in Vancouver in 2006. Cuba, speaking on behalf of G-77/CHINA, called for enhancing UN-HABITAT's operational activities in order to address the needs of slum dwellers in developing countries. While expressing concern over long-term sustainability of UN-HABITAT's financial base and regional offices, he supported its global campaign on natural and human-made disasters assessment and reconstruction, and recommended its endorsement.

The Netherlands, on behalf of the EU, said that a medium-term strategic plan and better coordination with other UN bodies, international and national partners should be the prerequisites for further operationalization of UN-HABITAT's functions. Stressing the importance of monitoring and evaluating the performance of UN-HABITAT programme managers, she requested the Executive Director to report back on this issue at GC-21. She also pointed to the potential link between UN-HABITAT global campaigns and poverty reduction strategy papers and national sustainable development strategies. Algeria, on behalf of AFRICA, highlighted the recent establishment of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD), and stressed that UN-HABITAT should develop operational capacity in order to provide practical assistance to development.

BRAZIL called for a new paradigm to guarantee universal access to housing and sanitation, one that combines public and private sector participation, sound regulatory frameworks, and innovative financial mechanisms. CHINA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, TANZANIA, BURKINA FASO, and GHANA outlined national activities on implementing the Habitat Agenda, and progress in the achievement of MDGs. Noting the rapid urbanization across the developing world, CHINA presented its housing policy, which focuses on: social rental housing system; real estate market incentives for affordable housing; reconstruction of dilapidated urban housing; and favorable policies for low and moderate income home buyers. He also invited delegates to the 2008 World Cities Forum in Nanjing. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION expressed its support to the proposed UN-HABITAT work programme, and emphasized the urgent need to address the problems of dilapidated and emergency housing stock.

TANZANIA highlighted its efforts on official recognition of land tenure rights of slum dwellers, survey of lands and informal settlements, and decentralization and strengthening of local governments. BURKINA FASO noted that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is holding back implementation of human settlements commitments. IRAQ and RWANDA highlighted their activities on post-conflict rehabilitation, with IRAQ stressing the importance of UN-HABITAT programmes in this regard, and RWANDA outlining its new habitat policy geared towards poverty reduction, decentralization, and good governance.

TUNISIA said that adequate housing is a fundamental human right, and highlighted governments' role in improving the quality of human settlements. BURUNDI emphasized the needs of least developed countries, noting that the country is still in the process of reconstruction after a long civil war and appealing to the international community for assistance in this regard. JAPAN reaffirmed its commitment to the realization of MDGs, emphasizing the importance of poverty reduction, sustainable growth, and the concept of "human security". He described cooperation activities with UN-HABITAT in assisting countries in their post-conflict construction. He also expressed concern about the proposal to introduce a voluntary indicative scale of contributions to the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation.

SOUTH AFRICA, speaking on behalf of the first AMCHUD, called for establishing partnerships in developing world to combat poverty, as well as developing a concerted framework of action to guide and reinforce individual national initiatives to manage, direct and harness the developmental attributes of towns and cities. SPAIN highlighted: involvement of all stakeholders, including private sector and local authorities; land tenure security; and gender equality. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA described its activities in putting the Habitat Agenda into practice, and underscored the need for cooperation among countries.

#### **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

The COW Chair Bernd Braun (Germany) said that an open-ended contact group was formed to discuss the UN-HABITAT work programme and budget for the biennium 2006-2007, requesting it to report back to the COW by Wednesday morning.

Chair Braun then introduced the special theme of involvement of civil society in improving local governance (HSP/GC/20/4). Lars Reutersward, UN-HABITAT Secretariat, presented an opening statement of the Executive Director, stressing that socio-economic benefits of enhanced civil society participation are greater than its costs, and highlighting the need for new ways to enhance the role of civil society in local governance and in implementing the Habitat Agenda and achieving MDGs. He encouraged delegates to deliberate on the process of involving civil society, including its conditions, incentives, and constraints.

Jan Peterson, National Congress of Neighborhood Women, moderated a multi-stakeholder dialogue, focusing on the importance of involving civil society in local governance, the obstacles to such involvement, and ways to address these obstacles. Representatives of grassroots communities, civil society, local governments, youth, faith-based organizations and national delegations stressed the importance of involving civil society in local governance in order to deliver services and manage resources more effectively. They identified as obstacles: unequal access to participatory processes, particularly for women, youth and the poor; lack of capacity of both governmental and non-governmental players to participate effectively; limited access to information; and lack of transparency in the policy-making process. They identified ways to address these obstacles through: building capacity at all levels; increasing transparency of local governments and of the structure and representativeness of civil society organizations; building on the current momentum and ongoing partnerships; mobilizing resources to scale up community initiatives; strengthening local democracy and decentralization; promoting a common set of values for governments and civil society; and balancing the powers of civil society, the private sector and governments.

#### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

On the first day, participants to the Governing Council were wrapped up in discussions on programmes and procedures, while some of the broader infrastructure issues such as water and sanitation have yet to come to the fore. As one interlocutor noted, the agenda favored the discussion of organizational mechanics early on, while relegating some of the substantial discussions to later sessions. A delegate observed that even the opening speeches tended to stress programmatic issues, e.g. focusing on the roles and activities of the Secretariat, rather than policies of governments *vis-à-vis* slums. There were numerous mentions of MDG Goal 7 and Target 11, but few references to the infrastructural changes required to achieve the target of upgrading 100 million slum dwellers. It is too soon to tell whether the discussions in this session of the Governing Council will lean more towards procedural or substantive issues in the course of the week. Nonetheless, one emerging trend is that of mainstreaming the UN-HABITAT agenda into broader sustainable development processes.