



THE 25TH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY (ISTANBUL+5): 6 JUNE 2001

The 25th Special Session of the General Assembly opened on Wednesday, 6 June 2001, in the General Assembly Hall. Delegates met in Plenary and also convened the Committee of the Whole (COW) for general debate on the review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Informal negotiations continued on five outstanding paragraphs in the draft declaration. In the Thematic Committee, delegates heard presentations from South Africa, Egypt, Colombia, Senegal and India.

PLENARY

At 9:00 am, the Chair of the Delegation of Finland, Kimmo Sasi, opened the 25th Special Session of the General Assembly. A moment of silence was observed in memory of the King and Queen of Nepal. General Assembly President Harri Holkeri was elected President of the Special Session. He emphasized that the Special Session is innovative because the Thematic Committee allows delegations to share experiences. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that partnerships with local authorities, NGOs and women's groups are particularly important for the eradication of poverty in urban areas.

PrepCom Chair Germán García-Durán (Colombia) presented the report of the Commission on Human Settlements (CHS) acting as the preparatory committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (A/S-25/2). He highlighted the Special Session's main substantive document, the draft report of the Executive Director on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda (A/S-25/3 and A/S-25/3/Add.1). Delegates then adopted a list of NGOs to address the Plenary and the provisional agenda (A/S-25/1). The General Assembly agreed to establish the COW under Chair García-Durán. Statements were made by one Deputy Prime Minister, 29 Ministers, four Vice Ministers, 18 Chairs of Delegations and three government representatives. A list of speeches is available on the Internet at <http://www.un.org/ga/habitat/statements>.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair García-Durán called the COW to order, and noted that the President of the General Assembly had informed delegates that the Bureau for PrepCom II would serve the COW. The Chair noted the organization of work, as conferred by the Plenary. The COW will

address three agenda items: item eight, the review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; item nine, further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; and item 10, the declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. Under Vice-Chair Olszowka, speakers then debated items eight and nine in the COW. Under Chair García-Durán, delegates resumed informal consultations on item 10.

DRAFT DECLARATION ON CITIES AND OTHER HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

PARAGRAPH 8 (REPORTS): In a reference to reports on the Habitat Agenda, the G-77/CHINA requested clarification of the legal connotations of "note" and "take note." Chair García-Durán explained that taking note means that delegates have read the document and have not rejected it. The text remains bracketed.

PARAGRAPH 33 (DEBT AND ODA): In language on external debt, JAPAN and the US pointed out that the reference to "as appropriate" was part of a compromise text, and that if it is bracketed as requested by the G-77/CHINA, then references to "continue to," "further," and "all," should also remain in brackets. The US proposed alternative text from GA resolution 55/184 on the context of poverty reduction. The G-77/CHINA objected to the introduction of new text. No agreement was reached. On reference to the ODA target of 0.7% of GNP, delegates accepted text on strengthening efforts to achieve the agreed target of 0.7% as soon as possible. NORWAY indicated disappointment with the language, describing it as "weak."

PARAGRAPH 42 (GENDER): On gender equality, Chair García-Durán highlighted two alternatives regarding security of tenure, and a proposal made by the EU on Tuesday to merge the text with paragraph 43, on equal access to economic resources. NORWAY proposed adding language to paragraph 43 to reflect that legislative and administrative reforms be undertaken in order to remove obstacles and inequalities. The EU said they could accept Norway's amendment. The G-77/CHINA indicated they could accept the original EU proposal, but asked Norway to withdraw his proposal. NORWAY stressed that the Habitat Agenda calls for the eradication of legal and social barriers, and said that failure to highlight that obstacles and inequalities still exist would be denying reality. Attempting to bridge the gap, the EU offered language recognizing that obstacles and inequalities still exist, and CANADA proposed text on striving to remove all possible obstacles and inequalities. The G-77/CHINA suggested an amendment recognizing the existence of different national laws and/or systems of land tenure in striving to remove all possible obstacles. After further discussion, the EU agreed to remove

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their proposal on recognizing the existence of obstacles and inequalities. The first EU proposal, and Norwegian, Canadian and G-77/China proposals remain in brackets.

PARAGRAPH 34 (WORLD SOLIDARITY FUND): In a reference to a world solidarity fund, the EU noted the UN Secretary-General is actively working on this issue, but the text implies it has been newly proposed. TUNISIA proposed adding “taking into account the provisions of the GA resolution 55/210,” and also suggested removing the words “actively consider” in reference to the establishment of the fund. The EU, supported by JAPAN, proposed alternate text on welcoming the ongoing consultations of the UN Secretary-General on the establishment of a fund. The G-77/CHINA said it would consider the text, which remains bracketed.

PARAGRAPH 37 (DECENTRALIZATION): Regarding Canada’s proposal tabled Tuesday on intensifying dialogue on effective decentralizations, the G-77/CHINA proposed that dialogue be in conformity with the legal framework and policies of each country. The EU added reference to the CHS and to guiding principles for local government and suggested that dialogue be undertaken with a view to reaching a consensus on an international enabling framework that would guide national legislative reforms. The US, EGYPT, JAPAN, CANADA, SUDAN, MEXICO and CHINA supported Canada’s proposal as with the G-77/China amendments, but opposed the EU’s amendments. Modifying the G-77/China-amended Canadian proposal, the EU proposed language on guiding principles for local government and, as appropriate, legal frameworks, noting this was agreed language by the CHS. The text remains bracketed.

THEMATIC COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Thematic Committee, Habeddine Belaid (Tunisia) introduced the Bureau, including Vice-Chairs José María Matamoros (Venezuela), Erna Witoelar (Indonesia) and Luís García Cerezo (Spain), and appointed Laszló Miklós (Slovak Republic) as Rapporteur. He highlighted the Committee’s sub-themes of housing, social development, balanced structures for human settlements, environmental management, economic development, governance, financing for urban development and strategies for development of cities. He stated that each presentation would examine impacts of multi-sectoral elements, including: participation, partnership and cooperation; poverty reduction; gender equality; social inclusion; upgrading of local practices; and knowledge exchange. He also noted that the 16 presentations to be given over three days reflect successes of national governments, local authorities, and civil society.

SOUTH AFRICA: Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele, Minister of Housing for South Africa, presented a video showing how a rights-based approach to housing is being addressed in both urban and rural areas nationwide. Strategies include legislation preventing unfair evictions, upholding the right to adequate housing and addressing the needs of women and the disabled. Housing subsidies and government support for roads, water, sanitation and electricity have combined successfully with regional cooperation and community involvement to increase access to housing and create employment. Discussion revolved around, *inter alia*, access to credit, collective savings, land ownership, technology transfer, upgrading slums, cooperation between government and communities, and the role of local authorities and women.

EGYPT: Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman, Egyptian Minister of Housing Utilities and Urban Communities, presented three urban rehabilitation and relocation projects, and attributed their success to the emphasis placed on cultural factors and stakeholder participation at all stages. Initial planning of the projects focused on a holistic view of the residential environment by incorporating elements such as green spaces and social services, and on ways to alleviate the financial burden on the state by identifying possibilities for private sector involvement. The debate focused on, *inter alia*, subsidies, how to ensure effective participation of women and marginalized sectors of society, and the enabling roles of all levels of government.

COLOMBIA: Alvaro José Cobo Soto, Minister of Housing for Colombia, discussed the Holistic Upgrading Programme in the city of Medellín. He said that contrasting populations and levels of socioeconomic development in peripheral areas have created conflict over territory and resources. He highlighted how a strategy involving local and national governments, supported by international financial assistance, has improved subnormal areas of the city with projects to establish a safe environment, improve quality of life and peacefully integrate citizens into the city. The discussion addressed: urban integration; progressive use of reference to “subnormal” areas to denote communities currently lacking acceptable living conditions; maintenance of new infrastructures and sustainability of new improvements; and the necessity of guaranteed resources.

SENEGAL: Seydon Sy Sall, Minister of Town Planning and National and Regional Development of Senegal, described a pilot project to secure land tenure, improve basic services and develop local economic bases in several squatter towns. He identified challenges including the difficulty in planning for future spontaneous settlements, improving access to credit, and the creation and implementation of mechanisms to prevent land speculation. Subsequent debate focused on curbing rural exodus, corruption at the local level, the distinction between land ownership and the right to use land, and a proposed UN-sponsored network to share Habitat-related best practices.

INDIA: Sheela Patel of SPARC, a Bombay partnership of local actors, discussed a program successfully initiated in three cities whereby municipalities pay for sustainable sanitation facilities created and managed by communities. Working together to design, build and maintain public toilet blocks has allowed municipalities, senior leaders, contracted artisans and the poor to work together, making sustainable sanitation occasion for social celebration. Participants focused on how such projects have reduced illness and disease, promoted community participation while producing awareness of the value of work and increasing management capabilities, provided opportunity to use grant funding to create successful projects that can garner funding from municipalities, and fostered public-private sector relationships.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As negotiations stretched into the evening yesterday, delegates wondered if newly introduced text for the chapeau and on foreign occupation and refugees would be the key unlocking the rest of the negotiations. Were delegations hardening positions on other issues in order to trade off later on? Would the chapeau talks prove to be “dicey?” Another observer suggested that the text on foreign occupation, added during informals earlier in the week, should include reference to Tibet. That would at least add a new political twist, he said. Then there was the delegate who wondered why negotiations were still being held at all, as smaller delegations were struggling to participate in the Thematic Committee. After all, he said, this was an innovation designed for governments to swap success stories rather than mutually unacceptable proposals...

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: At 9:00 am, delegates will meet for high-level debate in the General Assembly Hall.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE: The COW will meet at 9:00 am in Conference Room 2 to debate agenda items eight and nine.

INFORMAL NEGOTIATIONS: Delegates will meet at 10:00 am in the Trusteeship Council to continue negotiating outstanding paragraphs, including newly proposed text for a chapeau and on refugees and foreign occupation.

THEMATIC COMMITTEE: The Thematic Committee will begin at 9:00 am in Conference Room 4, and feature presentations from Tanzania, Sweden, China, Poland, Brazil, France, Nigeria and Spain.