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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 11 July 2000, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Pfanzelter (Vice-President). (Austria)

Contents

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: coordinated implementation by the United Nations system of the Habitat Agenda

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*In the absence of Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia),
Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.
The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.*

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: coordinated implementation by the United Nations system of the Habitat Agenda (A/54/855-E/2000/44 and A/55/83-E/2000/62)

1. **Mr. Cobbett** (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)) said that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) was in the final stages of implementing the recommendations arising from the revitalization process, as directed by the seventeenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements.

2. There was a very clear need for improved coordination between Habitat and other parts of the United Nations system as well as other partners and it had been recognized in the new strategy. He hoped that Member States would support Habitat's new vigour in implementing the Habitat Agenda, and make recommendations to strengthen that coordination. Habitat now had a much clearer focus, namely, helping Member States to deal with the processes and consequences arising from dramatic demographic shifts and the urbanization of poverty.

3. The Commission on Human Settlements had endorsed Habitat's new focus on policies and strategies to reduce urban poverty and the proposal that it should adopt the style and profile of an advocacy agency, and had welcomed a much clearer rights-based approach to its work. Habitat would increasingly focus on the role of women.

4. The purpose of Habitat's two flagship campaigns, the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign on Urban Governance, was to act as spearheads to raise the key policy issues currently facing cities and human settlements. The biggest builders of shelter, and the new builders of cities in the present-day world were the urban poor themselves, often in organizations dominated by women. The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure promoted recognition of the permanence of the urban poor, based on existing evidence that the granting of secure tenure was an essential and catalytic element in a sustainable,

pro-poor shelter policy. The Campaign would actively promote equality of treatment for women, particularly in respect of access to property title and equal inheritance rights. The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure would be launched on 16 July 2000 in Mumbai, India, at an event organized by the National Slum Dwellers Federation in partnership with Habitat, the Government of India and other concerned organizations.

5. The Global Campaign on Urban Governance focused on the essential elements necessary to properly manage cities and human settlements. Good urban governance was a vital precondition for economic efficiency, especially when it provided a citywide framework for sustained action against poverty. The "inclusive city", based on transparency, accountability and equity, recognized the rights and responsibilities of all urban citizens and provided a sound basis for sustainable urban development.

6. In connection with the draft World Charter for Local Self-Government, the Commission on Human Settlements had requested the Executive Director to establish a committee of local authorities to serve as an advisory body in implementing the Habitat Agenda. The Advisory Committee of Local Authorities was accordingly set up in Venice in January 2000 to undertake that task.

7. Habitat continued to explore ways of improving coordination, although at times the lack of resources represented a real constraint. Although a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), Habitat had not been able to play as direct and active a part as it would have wished. Clearly, Habitat needed to play a greater role, in consultation with UNDP, in bringing challenges in the area of urban and human settlements to the UNDG agenda.

8. The initiative by Habitat and the World Bank that had led to the establishment of the Cities Alliance in 1999 had been a significant step forward in improved coordination, especially as the entire logic of the Alliance was to expand its membership, based on a common vision of the problem. The two central themes of the Alliance were slum upgrading and city development strategies. He therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's endorsement of the Cities Without Slums initiative in his report to the Millennium Assembly.

9. Habitat had made real progress in recognizing its own weaknesses and implementing a comprehensive set of reforms. It was currently in a much stronger position to play its role as focal point for the Habitat Agenda. That role could only be strengthened through better coordination within the United Nations system and the identification of mechanisms that actively involved United Nations agencies in the field.

10. The special session of the General Assembly scheduled for June 2001 to consider progress in the overall implementation of the Habitat Agenda would provide an excellent platform to consider the size and extent of the urban revolution, the scale of the challenge facing Member States and future directions.

11. The current session of the Council provided Member States with a real opportunity to note progress within Habitat itself and, more importantly, in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Habitat would be delighted to receive critical support from the current session, and would welcome all decisions that would improve coordination and, ultimately, the quality of support that it was able to provide to Member States.

12. **Mr. Anaedu** (Observer for Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda had been slow because the international community and the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, had not fulfilled the commitments made in Istanbul. The United Nations Commission on Human Settlements had limited capacity as a focal point; inadequate representation and participation in the relevant United Nations policy coordination mechanisms made it unable to implement its mandate. There was virtually no coordinated mechanism for reviewing the contributions made by United Nations organizations and agencies, and support from the international community and the United Nations system had been provided on an ad hoc basis.

13. He realized that although the relevant United Nations organizations and agencies had contributed to the implementation process in a number of ways, there had been no coordinated action taken by the various agencies in cooperation with the Commission, which was often unaware of their contributions. Implementation of the Habitat Agenda was also affected by problems encountered in follow-up to other United Nations summits in the economic, social and related fields.

14. The Group of 77 and China supported the recommendation for the appointment of a task manager. However, under no circumstances should that individual replace the Commission as a focal point for coordination. Rather, the task manager should coordinate the activities of other United Nations agencies and partners at the international and regional levels. The Commission should also be strengthened institutionally through the inclusion of relevant policy mechanisms for follow-up to other United Nations conferences.

15. The goals of shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world could not be achieved without the international community's concerted efforts to provide the necessary resources, including new and additional financial resources and technical assistance to support implementation of the Habitat Agenda in developing countries. To that end, a trust fund should be established to assist developing countries in preparing their national reports.

16. **Ms. Gras** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and, in addition, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, said that Europe was one of the most highly urbanized continents and the countries of the European Union were therefore particularly attentive to the challenges presented by the worldwide trend towards urbanization and to the correct implementation of the Global Plan of Action adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). That Conference had clearly demonstrated that cities had an increasingly important role for the future of humanity. Most of the economic, social and ecological issues involved in sustainable development entailed improved management of cities and of their growth. Synergies with other activities of the United Nations system would have greater impact in future thanks to a participatory approach to environmental and development issues. Only resolute and continuous efforts in the long term could bring about major transformations or the needed changes in urban structures and systems of governance.

17. The European Union was fully convinced of the importance of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly, particularly as a forum to improve global awareness of the extent and seriousness of the challenges facing towns and cities, the importance of the sustainable development of human settlements and

the need to make more rapid progress on the road begun at the Istanbul Conference. The Council should reaffirm the commitments made at Istanbul and review the progress made and the obstacles encountered. The international community should share information on the progress that had been made, but also on the difficulties that had arisen and the problems still remaining, which must be clearly identified. The Council should ratify and validate the proposals made at the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee regarding the purpose and organization of the special session, in particular the draft resolution to be submitted at the next session of the General Assembly. It was particularly important to ensure the continuing involvement of various civil society partners, particularly international associations of local authorities, which must be given the opportunity to participate as effectively as possible in the monitoring and assessment process.

18. Most of the measures contained in the Global Plan of Action depended primarily on appropriate measures at the national level. The member States of the European Union intended to support the preparatory process as a whole and to continue, through bilateral cooperation activities and the programmes managed by the European Commission, their support for the developing countries. Her delegation hoped that the special session would make it possible to increase the involvement of the relevant United Nations agencies by improving the efficiency of the system in terms of the sharing and coordination of responsibilities.

19. **Mr. Moura** (Brazil) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

20. Although they affected both rural and urban areas, the problems of providing adequate shelter, services, infrastructure and employment were more severe in large urban agglomerations, mainly in developing countries. Their extent and diversity required not only global actions, but also specific measures for each region, country and city, with active involvement by local authorities and civil society as a whole. International cooperation also had a key role to play in the search for solutions to human settlement problems and their implementation.

21. The urban policies of his Government, based on the principle of the social function of ownership, had as their objectives the elimination of social inequalities, the decentralization of initiatives and programmes, and a commitment to partnership in the knowledge that human settlement problems were a matter of concern to society as a whole. Those policies viewed urban development from a broad, coordinated perspective, taking into account the concept of habitability which encompassed elements such as appropriate environmental conditions, security, privacy, sanitation, infrastructure and provision of social services.

22. The urban population in Brazil had increased dramatically from the 1940s to the 1990s, intensifying problems such as the deficit in basic infrastructure on the periphery of cities. In spite of the recent process of urban decentralization, informal settlements remained as one of the main challenges in Brazil. His Government was implementing significant measures to cope with the problem, including a programme to provide credits for low-income housing, which had benefited more than 600,000 families and generated almost one million jobs, sanitation programmes, and a programme to enhance habitability conditions, encompassing more than 3,000 infrastructure works and benefiting more than 400,000 low-income families.

23. Brazil was actively participating in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), including the eighth Regional Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. Brazil hosted the Technical Secretariat of that intergovernmental body, which was also the Regional Office of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, whose function was to promote coordination among its members in matters related to human settlements.

24. The international community must keep the spirit of Istanbul alive so as to make all human settlements healthier, safer, and more equitable and sustainable, to allow them to play their role as centres of civilization, promoting economic, social, cultural and scientific development.

25. **Mr. Zhang Yue** (China) said that the global plan of action contained in the Habitat Agenda was proof of the international community's determination to face the challenges of urbanization and other human settlement needs by drawing on the wisdom and ideas of people

from all walks of life and all over the world. The international community and the United Nations system had worked hard to achieve the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlement. Improved cooperation between agencies showed that the goals of Habitat II had been integrated into their programmes of work. His delegation supported the Commission on Human Settlements' role of focal point and endorsed the other proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on coordinated implementation by the United Nations system of the Habitat Agenda (A/55/83-E/2000/62).

26. Coordination required the adaptation of institutional arrangements in order to achieve desired objectives. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the task manager arrangement must be flexible enough to accommodate changes of workload, and the Commission's functions should be consistent with its role as lead agency in implementation of the Habitat Agenda. However, while coordination was merely the division of labour among different agencies, it also involved strengthening systematic communication among agencies and making conscientious efforts to ensure that the programmes of each agency contributed to the goals of the global conference for which it had primary responsibility and of other related conferences. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, United Nations agencies should submit more detailed reports on their work in connection with the Habitat Agenda.

27. The report of the Secretary-General gave the erroneous impression that the first session of the Preparatory Committee on the Istanbul five-year review had achieved consensus on the proposal that the special session of the General Assembly should focus on the themes of urban governance, secure tenure and the proposed world charter of local self-government. However, those themes had not even been included in the agenda of the second session of the Preparatory Committee, which had agreed to concentrate on issues already contained in the Habitat Agenda, including decentralization and strengthening of local authorities. He reiterated his delegation's position that the latter theme must be discussed within the framework of the Agenda, and that it was inappropriate to exaggerate the role of any one partner in implementation. He emphasized that decentralization should be carried out

by countries, taking into account their specific situation, experience and legal systems. He also stressed that it was the Secretariat's responsibility to provide Member States with accurate background information and documentation. Lastly, he urged Governments to conclude their national and regional reviews as quickly as possible.

28. **Mr. Grutle** (Norway) expressed his satisfaction with the ongoing revitalization process at the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, which was now much better placed to act as the focal point in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Norway had been able to contribute resources to the comprehensive restructuring exercise. National governments bore the main responsibility for implementing the Agenda, and it was the Centre's task to support them in doing so. The Council, at its present session, was invited to make recommendations on strengthening mechanisms of coordination, an essential process in tackling the challenges of urbanization, increasing urban poverty and social exclusion, and the growth of slums.

29. As explained in paragraph 67 of the Secretary-General's report (A/55/83-E/2000/62), the concept of a task manager system for the Habitat Agenda had been outlined to the Preparatory Committee for the five-year review of the Istanbul conference at its first session in May 2000. He agreed with the Committee that the proposed system should not displace the Centre, but should instead strengthen its central task of coordinating activities within the United Nations system, while streamlining the reporting system and improving the exchange of information. At present, many activities went unreported. His Government also took the view that in order to give political weight to the work of coordination, the Centre should become a member of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. A proposal to that effect should be included in the draft agreed conclusions. Coordinating mechanisms could also be strengthened through the work of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities.

30. The accelerating process of urbanization in the developing countries was one of the major challenges facing humanity at the beginning of the new century. The Habitat/World Bank initiative in launching the Cities Alliance and its plan of action "Cities Without Slums" was a welcome example of improved coordination within the United Nations system, and he welcomed the support of the Secretary-General for the initiative. The proposed establishment of an Urban

Forum could also help to strengthen coordination mechanisms in the approach of the United Nations system to urban issues. The global campaigns on urban governance and secure tenure recently launched by the Centre were strategic entry points for achieving the two main goals of the Habitat Agenda: shelter for all and sustainable human settlements. They also provided a normative framework for the concrete actions carried out under the aegis of the Cities Alliance initiative. His Government believed that security of tenure was essential in improving the daily lives of millions of slum dwellers, and had been one of the first to contribute funds to the campaign to ameliorate their status. He agreed with the Secretary-General that the campaign must focus on the role of women as active participants, and hoped that the formal inauguration of the campaign would attract support at the highest political levels.

31. Because the pace of urbanization in the developing countries was much faster than had been foreseen at the time of Habitat II, care must be taken during the five-year review to re-examine the implementation of the commitments made at that time, taking into account the need to mobilize resources at all levels in future in the field of human settlements. In order to succeed, the review should benefit from the participation of the developing and least developed countries. An inadequate number of developing countries had attended the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the five-year review. His Government had made funds available to enable developing countries to participate in the review, and he urged other donor countries to do likewise.

32. Unique partnerships between Governments and civil society had developed during the preparatory process for Habitat II and subsequently. Local authorities, in particular, had played an active role in implementing the Habitat Agenda, sharing in the common efforts to create "Cities Without Slums". The review should adopt a clear political statement expressing commitment to that goal.

33. **Mr. Garcia-Duran** (Colombia), speaking as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda, held in Nairobi from 8 to 12 May 2000, gave a summary of the work of the Committee's first session. There were high-level segments and a segment consisting of dialogue with local authorities.

The high-level segment had considered the scope of the review process and the preparations for the Special Session held at the local, regional and national levels, as well as the role of local authorities and of agencies in the United Nations system. The dialogue with local authorities had been pursued in the spirit of partnership ushered in at Habitat II. It had focused on building a normative framework for good urban governance and for secure tenure, and on patterns of autonomous local government. Six resolutions had been adopted by the Preparatory Committee: on international cooperation and financial support for the preparatory activities for the Special Session; on the role local authorities in the preparatory process; on the scope of the review process; on preparatory activities at the local, regional and national levels; on the expected outcome of the Special Session; and on the participation of youth in the review process.

34. It had been decided that the second session of the Preparatory Committee should give priority to policies for supporting the family. Intensive work was needed during the inter-sessional period to ensure that the second session would be successful. The two global campaigns on good urban governance and secure tenure were closely linked. Adequate coordination within the United Nations system was important in ensuring a regular flow of information about activities to implement the Habitat Agenda. To improve the level of coordination, it was essential to institute the proposed task manager system. Pointing out that the General Assembly, in resolution 35/76 of 5 December 1980, had invited the Secretary-General to arrange for the Centre to participate in all aspects of the work of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, he emphasized that the revitalized Centre was now the focal point for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and that membership of the ACC would be very helpful in enabling it to perform that role. The five-year review conference should adopt a general political declaration on the role of cities and human settlements in the new millennium and the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities, which should be encouraged to continue its work.

35. **Ms. Domenach-Chich** (United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO)) said that for UNESCO, the task of humanizing cities amounted to placing citizens themselves at the heart of the urban project, and enabling them to make the choices which governed

their lives. The rights of urban dwellers must be rendered effective so that they could exercise their citizenship. In implementing the Habitat Agenda, UNESCO's approach since 1996 had been inspired by the importance of education and culture, and of the sciences and communication, in constructing viable human settlements based on a mastery of the physical and social environment. It relied on a partnership among public actors at the international, national and local levels, municipal authorities, private sector enterprises and researchers, specialists in urban issues, non-governmental organizations and grass-roots communities. The partnership approach sought to build bridges between the decision makers and the real world. UNESCO's many activities in implementing the Habitat Agenda, summarized in its report "Cities and Urban Development" all focused on two main themes: combating urban poverty and achieving democratic and participatory urban governance.

36. UNESCO's integrated urban strategy aimed to improve living conditions for underprivileged urban populations, and to enhance their ability to take part in local and national life while playing a full part in their own development. The pilot projects in which UNESCO was engaged would provide material for methodological guides and for political decision makers. A six-year project in six shanty town areas in Dakar, Port au Prince, Djenné in Mali, and in sites in Colombia, Cambodia and Buenos Aires fostered a participatory approach in supporting initiatives by over 500,000 local residents to improve their conditions, for example in the supply of fresh water, rubbish collection, sanitation and the refurbishment of buildings. The aim of that project was to enhance the ability of the populations to organize themselves and to secure their rights through democratic urban governance and the fight against poverty. UNESCO played a catalysing and facilitating role, bringing together partners with no experience of working together and legitimizing their efforts to promote the common good. Such projects could be taken up by national authorities and could inspire public policy. She concluded by expressing support for the proposed task manager system, and referred to the European Habitat Forum, to be held on 14 and 15 September 2000.

37. **Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia) said that the Habitat Agenda could not be considered in isolation from the work of earlier conferences. He therefore welcomed the proposal to establish a task manager system to provide

support for the transformation of good practices and lessons learned into policies at the national and global levels.

38. His Government had incorporated all the recommendations contained in the Habitat Agenda in its basic development strategy, the Strategy and Programme for Physical Planning in the Republic of Croatia, which had the force of law. Progress in achieving the goals of the Agenda was monitored through follow-up documents and the establishment of an information system on physical planning. The Strategy and Programme focused on problem areas such as the Adriatic islands and formerly occupied areas since the 1990s war that had targeted settlements. Croatia's economic situation posed problems with regard to the availability of funds and staff, particularly at the level of local government, but efforts were being made to mobilize available resources. His Government supported the participation of civil society, local authorities and the private sector in the implementation of national plans of action and the Agenda.

39. The Ministry for Environment Protection and Physical Planning had been designated to coordinate his Government's participation in the Special Session of the General Assembly and had established a National Committee to prepare Croatia's report. The inclusion of the current agenda item in the Council's substantive session would act as a catalyst for national reporting. His delegation supported the proposal that the special session of the General Assembly for the five-year review of the outcome of the Istanbul Conference should adopt a declaration on the role of cities and human settlements in the new millennium.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.