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Agenda item 10

ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE PRIVATE SECTOR,  
PARLIAMENTARIANS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND OTHER  
PARTNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

Report of Committee II

Addendum

Hearings involving representatives of the Parliamentarians Forum

1. At its 6th meeting, on 6 June 1996, Committee II held hearings involving representatives of the Parliamentarians Forum.
2. Presentations were made by the following: Senator Oscar Lopez Velarde Vega, President of the Global Forum of Parliamentarians on Habitat; Mr. Mbeo, Chairman of the African Regional Council of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat; Mrs. Tamako Nakanishi, Founding President of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat; and Ms. Sirpo Pietikainen, member of the Parliamentarians for Global Action.
3. After presentations, a dialogue/discussion took place between the partners and the representatives of Guinea, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Chile, Sweden, Senegal, the Philippines, Lesotho, Jordan, Venezuela, Mexico, Japan, Italy, the Sudan, India, South Africa, Ghana, Paraguay, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Canada, Kenya, Equatorial Guinea, Morocco, Kazakstan, Sierra Leone, Indonesia and Turkey.

4. The Chairman's summary of the hearings is set out below:

Role and contribution of the Parliamentarians Forum

The hearing opened with an introductory statement by the President of the Global Forum of Parliamentarians on Habitat II, in which he described the role of parliamentarians at the Conference and in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The organizers of the Forum and delegates expressed their gratitude to the United Nations for facilitating the meeting and providing the opportunity in Committee II to discuss the role of the parliamentarians and their contribution to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The Chairman of the African Regional Council of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat II introduced the Declaration of Principles and Commitments of the Global Forum of Parliamentarians on Habitat II. This was followed by a statement by the Founding President of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat II, stressing the importance of partnership in achieving sustainable development on our planet. The representative of Parliamentarians for Global Action also made a statement.

It was noted that the problems of urban development were, in the first instance, political. This underlined the important role of parliamentarians in the development of human settlements.

During the discussion it was pointed out that parliamentarians often had inadequate information on legislation in other countries, including, inter alia, in the human settlements sector. This meant that there was a strong need for increasing international cooperation, especially at the regional level. As important as legislation itself was an understanding of the way in which different laws work in reality.

While in many countries the main problem is the lack of needed legislation, existing legislation can also create unnecessary, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, such as is often the case with building permissions. It was stressed that, besides facilitating legislation, the follow-up, assessment and evaluation of achievements were also important elements to be considered.

Several delegates expressed their support for the Declaration. Delegates expressed their wish to see parliamentarians facilitating legislation that supported human settlements development in their countries. They also commended the parliamentarians for their commitment to the ongoing debate on the Habitat Agenda and for their decision to contribute actively to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

The question of partnership between the public and the private sectors was considered to be of great importance by a number of delegates who expressed concern about the questions of finance and transparency, the spirit of solidarity, and methods of reducing the growing gap between the poor and the rich. Decentralization of financial resources and empowerment of local authorities should be ensured to provide a policy that can assist the people and achieve the goals and principles of the Declaration.

The question of information-sharing was raised by several delegates who emphasized the need to make information accessible to all by creating information centres for that would cover different issues such as housing, neighbourhood management, and credits and loans for building and improving houses. The Best Practices Initiative was mentioned as the best forum for stimulating information exchange and formulating future policies.

Delegates also emphasized the importance of proper planning and utilization of urban spaces and the urgent need for reform of land legislation. Women's access to land as well as the equal right to own and inherit property was particularly emphasized.

Strengthening cooperatives and civic societies and facilitating, through proper legislation, the involvement of communities in the design and implementation of projects for the development of their neighbourhoods and cities was underscored. The equal participation of women, youth and children should be institutionalized. However, delegates stressed that legislation should be flexible enough to help achieve the maximum benefit for the development of cities and, indeed, for the betterment of the living conditions of the poor.

Two major themes of the Conference were also referred to by a number of delegates. The right to decent housing for all, where every person could live in peace and serenity, was underlined. Some delegates considered housing to be a fundamental human right for which the international community should draw up the necessary institutional framework. It was noted that the commonly recognized need to change present production and consumption patterns into more sustainable ones requires economic measures such as shifting the emphasis from the taxation of labour to the taxation of production and consumption, for instance in the form of energy taxes.

In conclusion, participants stressed the importance of partnership, strengthening community involvement in city development and the crucial role parliamentarians can play in promoting the proper legislation to ensure safe and healthy cities for the next millennium.

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