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(HABITAT II)**

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Agenda item 10

THE 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 non-governmental organizations  
and community-based organizations

1. At its 10th and 11th meetings, on 10 June 1996, Committee II held hearings involving representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs).
2. At the 10th meeting, on 10 June, presentations were made by the following: Mr. Jeffrey Barber, Integrative Strategies Forum; Ms. Gwynn Smalls, Women's Environment and Development Organization, speaking on behalf of the Women's Caucus; Ms. Corazon Soloman, Community Organization, Training and Research Advocacy Institute, speaking on behalf of the Women, Homes and Community Super Coalition; Ms. Vera Dakova, Neighbourhood Development Consultant Group, Co-Chairperson of the International Facilitating Group, speaking on behalf of Eastern European women; Ms. Mechta Van Dan Boogert, representative of the International Council of Women, Co-Chairperson of the International Facilitating Group, speaking on behalf of Western European women; Ms. Clara Osinulu, International Federation of University Women, speaking on women and decision-making; Ms. Zullu Alvarado, National Congress of Neighbourhood Women, speaking on behalf of disabled persons;

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Ms. Kauna Nghinaunye, International Youth Consultant on Habitat II, speaking on behalf of the Youth Caucus; Ms. Kavitha Krishnamoorthy, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, speaking on behalf of the Rights of the Child Caucus; Mr. Richard Wilkins, United Families International, speaking on behalf of Stable Communities; and Ms. Cecilia Kinuthia, Liaison Centre International, speaking on the environment.

3. After the presentations, a dialogue/discussion took place between the partners and representatives of the Holy See, Chile, Lesotho, Slovakia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ireland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, Sweden, South Africa, Jordan, the Sudan, the Philippines, Equatorial Guinea, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Greece, Egypt and Turkey.

4. The observer for Palestine took part in the dialogue.

5. A number of representatives of non-governmental organizations also took part in the dialogue.

6. At the 11th meeting, on 10 June, presentations were made by the following: Mr. Malick Gaye, ENDA/HIC, speaking on urban poverty; Mr. Mwaura Johnson, speaking on urbanization; Mr. Thomas Joseph, ActionAid, speaking on poverty and credit; Ms. Yasmin Shariff, International Federation of University Women, speaking on sustainable development; Mr. Taskin Sakarya, Union Türkisher Akademiker e.v., speaking on immigration and human rights; Mr. Chandra Ranaraja, Kandy Municipal Council, CBO Organizations, speaking on behalf of the Asian Caucus; Mr. Mohamed Soumare, Environment/Development Action in the Third World, speaking on behalf of the African Caucus; Ms. Ramona Chuckaree, Network of Non-governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago, speaking on behalf of the Latin American/Caribbean Caucus; Mr. Seif Allah Alnaga, Secretary-General of the Society of Egyptian Architects, speaking on behalf of the Middle East and Arab Region Caucus; Mr. James Wolgast, European Law Students' Association, speaking on implementation; and Mr. John Maskell, Campaign for the Earth.

7. After the presentations, statements were made by the representatives of India, Ghana, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Costa Rica, Chile, Nigeria, Rwanda, Egypt, Greece, Uganda, Italy, the Sudan, Burundi, Lesotho and South Africa.

8. A statement was made by the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference.

9. A representative of the local authorities, as well as representatives of a number of non-governmental organizations, also took part in the dialogue.
10. The Chairman's summary of the hearings is set out below:

Role and contribution of non-governmental organizations  
and community-based organizations in the implementation  
of the Habitat Agenda

The meeting benefited from presentations by representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and caucuses focusing on the rights of women, youth, children, the family and the disabled. These presentations provided for a lively and open debate among delegations and NGOs which revealed agreements as well as disagreements on the issues raised.

Several speakers recognized the historical importance of bringing central and local Governments together with NGOs and the private sector for an open and constructive dialogue on human settlements issues. Other participants stressed that in implementing human settlements improvements, partnerships are essential for achieving sustainability. It is, however, crucial for such partnerships to be based on people's needs. Moreover, if such partnerships are to become equal, communities must be given the resources and information necessary to enable them to fulfil their roles.

The representatives of NGOs focusing on gender issues highlighted the need for new forms of power and resource-sharing. Claiming that women and NGOs have the creativity to deal effectively with the improvement and revitalization of cities, delegates stressed that there should be an enabling legal and financial framework to support such activities. It was recognized that in some countries Governments have the ability to provide a facilitating framework, while in others, Governments are only now beginning to realize the benefits of partnerships and coalitions.

The danger of NGOs being controlled or manipulated by influential individuals, groups or Governments was pointed out, and NGOs were therefore urged to prepare their own policy and strategy platforms and base their work on dialogue and consensus. Delegates also asked how to ensure that the voiceless people - those who are not part of an NGO - are heard. The answers suggested that Governments could collaborate with

other civil society organizations where NGOs do not exist. Some NGO representatives questioned whether the selected speakers were sufficiently representative of the present NGO community and stressed the issue of equitable representation of grass-roots organizations in the meeting.

A representative of the Disability Rights Caucus highlighted the attitudinal, environmental, educational and communication problems leading to discrimination against the disabled. It was stressed that the needs of the disabled should be integrated into mainstream development programmes and that the disabled should be part of decision-making processes at all levels. The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were proposed as a guideline for Governments and NGOs.

The Youth Caucus recognized the relevance of Habitat II issues for youth, including access to adequate shelter, migration, crime, unemployment and the environment. Youth should therefore take part in determining solutions and prioritizing issues; youth should also embrace a spirit of true partnership. It was suggested that the well-being of children is an indication of a healthy habitat and governance.

NGOs concerned with environmental issues expressed support for a plan of action that will ensure a safe and sustainable environment and structure of governance for human settlements. They recognized the useful work started with the Local Agenda 21 framework and proposed to focus on linkages between the Habitat Agenda and Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

Many contributors stressed the importance of the partner dialogues started in the preparatory process of Habitat II and the need for a continuation of this process, in which the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) could play a key role. As part of the envisaged follow-up to the Conference, partnerships should be continued and potentially extended to take place within the Commission on Human Settlements.

The presentations were supplemented by input from representatives of various NGOs and caucuses focusing on the environment, urbanization, poverty and credit, sustainable development in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Arab region, and associations of law

students. All parties welcomed this unique opportunity for a dialogue at a United Nations conference and suggested that this should serve as a precedent for future conferences.

The NGOs expressed their firm commitment to full and active participation in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action. However, a clear concept should be developed as to which roles the different actors should play as equal partners, and what the mechanisms for cooperation should be. It was underlined that NGOs have a vital role to play as partners to Governments when implementing the Habitat Agenda, because they have strong links to the grass-roots level and represent large interest groups. They have developed the skills and expertise needed for capacity-building at the local level and for mobilizing resources. Community participation and applying holistic approaches to complex problems, such as poverty, are areas where NGOs have a comparative advantage. Both Governments and NGOs believe that the relationship between NGOs and Governments should be strengthened through continuous communication and mutual trust.

Government representatives reconfirmed the important role of NGOs in implementing the Habitat Agenda but also cautioned that NGOs should not attempt to take on the role of Governments.

Substantively, the NGOs made wide-ranging suggestions on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The right to housing, and participatory and democratic approaches to urban management were mentioned on several occasions. It was pointed out that migration and immigration are a fact of life and should be viewed by Governments as an opportunity, as the interaction of cultures is positive. Vulnerable groups were highlighted on several occasions, with special focus on the elderly.

The NGOs made it clear that they are not a heterogeneous body and often differ in opinion. However, they believe that the diversity of attitudes constitutes a source of strength in this sector. They suggested that this diversity of opinion could be used by Governments to compare attitudes, build consensus and solve conflicts. It was stated that NGOs should work together to enhance acceptance of various groups and opinions.

Several delegates questioned the sincerity of NGOs and suggested that they should strive to demonstrate increased transparency and accountability towards Governments. The impartiality and autonomy of some NGOs was questioned by a few delegates. Others challenged the NGOs on whether they fully represented the interests of their constituencies.

The NGOs reconfirmed the importance of the United Nations system and suggested that the United Nations should provide support by creating a data bank on successful practices. They believe that only through the support of the United Nations will it be possible to promote and spread the use of new technologies, such as those in the field of sanitation, which will improve the living environment and be affordable to a large majority. The United Nations could assist in spreading the "good practices" of NGOs at both community and global constituency levels. Throughout the discussions, both Government delegations and the NGO representatives stressed the need to strengthen the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) so that it could function as an efficient mechanism for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

In conclusion, the NGO representatives reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and offered their creative expertise and contributions to Governments.

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