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COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. At its fifty-fourth session in May 1999, the Commission recognized the importance of its operational activities and the contribution they made to economic integration and strengthening stability, peace and good neighbourly relations among countries of the region. The Commission requested each principal subsidiary body to look at the operational activities undertaken in its field of competence, and to identify the needs for future operational activities and financing for them. A synthesis of the conclusions will be submitted for the Commission's consideration at its next session in spring 2000. This note has been prepared in response to this request by the Commission.

I. ECE OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

2. The forms and methods of the ECE operational activities vary according to the needs of the recipient countries and sub-regions. They involve:

- Consultative and advisory missions;
- Preparation and implementation of specific country-(or a sub-region-) oriented programmes or projects;
- Organization of workshops, seminars, study tours, training programmes and expert group meetings;
- Preparation of country-oriented studies and surveys.

Many of these activities are carried out in close cooperation with other international and regional organizations: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), etc. The ECE regional advisers on energy, transport, environment, statistics, and trade play an active role in these activities.

3. Since 1997, the number of operational activities undertaken in cooperation or in the framework of sub-regional organizations and initiatives has grown. ECE agreements with the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as support to the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) have reinforced this trend. Internet sites have been created to post extensive information on the ECE operational activities.

4. The lack of financing and staff resources is the major impediment to meeting the increasing demand for such activities. Even though efforts are being made to use existing resources as efficiently as possible to meet the requests for technical assistance from many ECE member States, there is still a need to for additional financing. It is also recognized that the institution of regional advisers should be strengthened.

II. OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE

5. In recent years, the Committee on Human Settlements streamlined its programme of work and reduced the number of programme elements from ten in 1995 to six in 1999. When in 1996 the Committee accomplished its work on basic guidelines and strategies in housing policy, sustainable human settlements planning and management, land administration, urban renewal and housing modernization, it reoriented its activities towards the practical implementation of these guidelines and strategies. This was done within the same programme elements, but the emphasis was put on operational activities and technical assistance in policy matters in individual ECE countries along the strategic directions identified in the guidelines.

6. The housing policy guidelines found their practical implementation in the preparation of the country profiles on the housing sector. Studies were made in Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia. A study on Lithuania is under preparation. Attention was given to the formulation of practical recommendations to improve the performance of the housing sector and encourage greater accountability on the part of governments towards public opinion. A practical workshop on housing privatization in Poland was organized in Cracow in June 1999 in cooperation with the Cooperative Housing Foundation (United States). The ideas developed in the guidelines on sustainable human settlements planning and management, as well as the strategy on housing modernization, were further addressed and tested in practical case studies, implemented at the local level in both market economies and countries in transition. The Committee's case studies aim at

sharing experience and best practices in the implementation of related policies at the local level. Close attention is being given to the promotion of true partnership between all actors and levels of government. At the request of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, an expert mission is planned in July 1999 to review the sustainability aspects of its national programmes on urban and regional planning, housing and land registration.

7. The land administration guidelines are being applied by the Meeting of Officials on Land Administration (since May 1999, the Working Party on Land Administration) through an extensive workshop programme and networking among land administration authorities in ECE countries. Close contacts were established and joint activities are undertaken with the World Bank, EU and USAID. To avoid duplication of work and make the operational activities of international donors and lending organizations more efficient, an inventory of international land administration projects and programmes was drawn up and regular ad hoc meetings are organized with these organizations and agencies. A team of land administration experts visited Albania in June 1998 and provided technical assistance to the Albanian land market plan.

III. RECONSTRUCTION AND REHABILITATION IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

8. The deep economic problems that countries in south-eastern Europe have been facing since the start of their economic and political transition are particularly complex. The conflict in Yugoslavia has made an already unfavourable situation worse, especially in the Committee's areas of competence. Housing and infrastructure are being destroyed, land administration is in disarray, real property rights are not respected, and many people are marginalized. International action has at least four broad goals:

- To establish a comprehensive recovery programme with national and regional dimensions;
- To speed up institutional and structural reforms;
- To rebuild housing and infrastructure; to develop a real property rights system;
- To re-establish good neighbourly relations.

9. This will imply significant technical assistance and mobilization of financial resources. There is no doubt that the effectiveness of the reconstruction process will depend heavily on these countries' abilities to absorb this assistance.

10. Based on its experience in addressing reconstruction and development problems of human settlements in the ECE region since the Second World War, and its existing network of authorities in housing, urban and regional planning, and land administration, the Committee could undertake specific internationally coordinated actions. The Committee could start designing a project proposal in these areas to be an integral part of coordinated actions of ECE, other United Nations organizations and agencies, and the international community at large.

IV. NEEDS FOR OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

11. The Committee's operational activities were successful due to the effective reorientation of its programme of work, the availability of the ECE Trust Fund on Human Settlements and recent financial contributions from the delegations of the Netherlands and Finland to the country profile programme. However, to respond to the emerging needs for operational activities in the Balkan region and at the same time continue the present level of activities in other ECE countries, particularly on country profiles of the housing sector and land administration, the secretariat would need two consultants or advisers (one on housing and planning, another on land administration). Operational activities in general and in the Balkan region in particular require a timely response, which is not possible if the human resources are not available.

12. In consultation with its Advisory Network, the Committee may wish to seek a solution to this problem. Additional contributions earmarked for the operational activities for the Balkan region and consultancies to the secretariat from the public and/or the private sector may be a option.