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ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
Preparatory Committee
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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Secretary-General

A. Background

1. The purpose of this report is to review the progress of the preparatory work for HABITAT: The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, to be held from 31 May to 11 June 1976 at Vancouver, Canada. A similar report was also submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session in accordance with its resolution 3128 (XXVIII) of 13 December 1973. 1/
2. At its meeting of 12 November 1974, the Second Committee of the General Assembly considered the report of the Secretary-General and decided that the Conference-Exposition on Human Settlements should henceforth be known as HABITAT: The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. The Committee agreed to the convening of the first formal session of the Preparatory Committee at Headquarters from 15 to 24 January 1975 and requested the Secretary-General to submit the report of the Preparatory Committee on its first formal session to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme at its third session as well as a brief progress report, through the Governing Council of UNEP, to the General Assembly at its thirtieth session.
3. At its twenty-seventh 2/ and twenty-eighth sessions, the General Assembly decided to hold a Conference-Exposition on Human Settlements, accepted the offer of the Government of Canada to act as host, and decided to hold the Conference in Vancouver, Canada, from 31 May to 11 June 1976. The Assembly also established

1/ Document A/9729 dated 18 September 1974.

2/ General Assembly resolution 3001 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972.

a Preparatory Committee, consisting of highly qualified representatives nominated by the Governments of 56 Member States, to advise the Secretary-General of the Conference. 3/

4. Prior to the establishment of a Conference secretariat, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, in co-operation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized a small preparatory planning group which carried out preliminary planning activities from 1 September 1973 to 15 April 1974, when the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed Mr. Enrique Peñalosa as Secretary-General of the Conference.

5. In May 1973, the first step in selecting tentative topics was taken when a meeting of experts was convened in Vancouver to discuss possible substantive themes for the Conference and the criteria for the selection of demonstration projects. These conclusions were presented to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme at its first session, in June of 1973. The Council adopted the proposals in principle, requesting further refinement and detail.

6. In response to General Assembly resolution 3128 (XXVIII), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a task force /in order/ to provide a focus for the several divisions within the Department which have a direct interest in the substantive matters to be discussed in conjunction with the Conference. The task force submitted its final report to the Secretary-General of the Conference and this report was incorporated into the documentation for the first informal consultation of the Preparatory Committee.

7. At its second session, held in Nairobi from 11 to 22 March 1974, 4/ the Governing Council of UNEP agreed to participate in the financing of the exposition element of the Conference and, to that end, requested the Executive Director to submit a complete budget at its third session. In the intervening period, the Council authorized \$1.5 million for 1974 and 1975 from the resources of the Environment Fund apportioned to the area of human settlements, human health, habitat and well-being, and requested the Executive Director to provide the Council, at its third session, with a precise accounting of the allocation of the sum in question.

8. The Council also decided to consider, if necessary, any further financing of the exposition, in the light of the budget referred to above and the results of the Executive Director's efforts, in co-operation with the Secretary-General of the Conference, to obtain other substantial contributions. 5/

3/ General Assembly resolution 3128 (XXVIII) of 13 December 1973.

4/ For the report on the session, see Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-ninth session, Supplement No. 25 (A/9625).

5/ Ibid., annex I, decision 15 (II).

B. Informal consultation of the Preparatory Committee

9. Immediately after his appointment, the Secretary-General of the Conference convened an informal consultation of the Preparatory Committee with the purpose of obtaining from member Governments the guidance required to launch the next phase of the preparatory process of the Conference. The consultation was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 28 to 31 May 1974.

10. The informal consultation clarified a number of important issues on which the Conference secretariat needed the advice and support of member Governments. The meeting delineated some of the areas of major concern to the Conference, clarified the scope and purpose of the demonstration projects, which are to be an integral part of the Conference, provided guidelines with regard to the date and agenda of the first formal meeting of the Preparatory Committee and valuable guidance for planning the preparatory process.

11. Following the proposals of a working group which was set up during the informal consultation, consensus was reached on a list of issues which, in the opinion of the delegates attending the meeting, should receive high priority during the preparatory period and at the Conference itself. These issues and themes were further expanded as a result of subsequent consultations with a group of experts and the relevant units of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The latest conclusions of these deliberations and the present thinking of the Secretariat have been incorporated in the document A/CONF.70/PC/4, entitled "Substantive framework for the Conference".

C. Contacts with Member States

12. On 18 June 1974, the Secretary-General of the Conference addressed a detailed communication to all Member States outlining the current status of the preparatory work, a list of the proposed issues, the progress made at the meeting of the informal consultation, and the concept of the structure of the Conference.

13. Governments were requested to provide their views on the tentative list of issues outlined in the letter, give consideration to the preparation of national reports, inform the secretariat about the issues or themes to be illustrated in the demonstration project presentation at the Conference, and designate an organization or individual formally responsible for co-ordinating their national preparations for the Conference and for ensuring all future contacts with the secretariat and the host Government. Member States were also invited to develop demonstration projects in situ, some of which could be designated as official Conference sites which could be visited by the local population and also by outside visitors, possibly on their way to and from Vancouver.

14. The above communication also included an explanatory note on the audio-visual presentations as well as preliminary technical specifications for these presentations to assist the countries concerned in the identification and presentation of suitable demonstration projects.

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15. As of 8 November 1974, 30 Member States had designated an individual or organization specifically responsible for co-ordinating their national preparations for the Conference and for ensuring all future contacts with the secretariat and the host Government. Proposals for possible demonstration projects had been indicated by over 20 countries. Additional detailed guidelines are being sent in November 1974 to all Member States concerning (a) the preparation of national reports and (b) demonstration projects. The essence of these guidelines has been presented in two other documents (see A/CONF.70/PC/4 and A/CONF.70/PC/6).

16. The Secretary-General of the Conference and his Deputy paid official visits to 29 Member States including Canada, the host country. 6/ Visits to 28 other Member States have been planned for October through December 1974. 7/

17. In order to increase response from Member States, it has been decided to intensify field visits by members of the secretariat to assist Governments in the preparation of national reports, identification and preparation of audio-visual projects, designation of national demonstration projects in situ, and generally to provide information and assistance that would facilitate participation of the countries concerned in the preparatory work and in the Conference itself.

D. Interagency co-operation

(a) Specialized agencies and other similar organizations of the United Nations system

18. The support and collaboration of the specialized agencies and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system is considered vital throughout the preparatory process. To this end, in June 1974 the Secretary-General of the Conference participated in an interagency meeting convened at his request in Geneva by the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination. All agencies were requested to indicate the nature of their contributions to the preparatory process and the Conference.

19. A number of agencies have submitted their proposals for contribution papers to the basic Conference documentation as well as proposals for audio-visual projects and for otherwise assisting in the preparatory process for the Conference. Nearly all the proposals are in the form of tentative topics for discussion which may later be elaborated into detailed project proposals. A list of these proposals was prepared and distributed, prior to the second interagency meeting held in Geneva on 13 September 1974.

6/ Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Venezuela, Yugoslavia.

7/ Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Zaire, Zambia.

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(b) The Department of Economic and Social Affairs

20. Close working relations have been established with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs since the beginning of the preparatory process. The Department contributed to the technical documents for the first informal consultation of the Preparatory Committee, and assisted the Conference secretariat in developing the substantive framework of the Conference. In October 1974, an ESA working group was established to prepare the "State of human settlements" report with the participation of the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning and other divisions of ESA, as well as the specialized agencies concerned. In addition, meetings were held with the representatives of the Department for preparation of specific reports including one on squatters and slums. Some of these specific inputs may be ready in time for discussion in the regional meetings.

(c) United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities

21. The Conference secretariat regards the full co-operation of UNDP resident representatives essential in its contacts with the Member States concerned and in securing the necessary information and advice, particularly for visits by the Secretary-General of the Conference and other members of the secretariat.

Upon the request of the Secretary-General of the Conference, UNDP sent a letter to all its resident representatives in the field informing them about the Conference and requesting their co-operation with the secretariat. Similar letters were also sent by UNFPA to its field co-ordinators. Discussions are also under way with UNDP to organize meetings of UNDP experts and their local counterparts as appropriate, serving in the field of human settlements in various developing regions.

The main purpose of such meetings would be:

- (i) To provide a forum for exchange of experience among current projects concerned with human settlements;
- (ii) To provide the Conference secretariat with the latest information on key issues and problems in various developing countries, thus enabling the secretariat to draft recommendations for the resolution of these issues and problems during the preparatory process and at the Conference itself;
- (iii) To enable the UNDP experts and their local counterparts to assist, as appropriate, the Governments concerned to participate in the preparatory process of the Conference; and
- (iv) To enable the UNDP experts and their local counterparts to assist the Governments concerned in identifying demonstration projects in order to prepare audio-visual material to be shown in Vancouver.

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(d) The regional economic commissions

22. In June 1974, the Secretary-General of the Conference attended in Geneva the meeting of the executive secretaries of the regional economic commissions and subsequently held individual discussions with them. After hearing a progress report from the Secretary-General on the Status of Conference preparations, the executive secretaries indicated their willingness to co-operate with the secretariat of the Conference in respect to both the promotional and the substantive aspects. The executive secretaries' meeting also expressed the hope that adequate resources would be made available to the secretariat of the regional economic commissions for this purpose, as the presently available resources were modest.

23. A number of regional meetings are planned for June to September of 1975, though the details have not as yet been worked out. The purpose of these meetings would be (a) to evolve an over-all regional outlook on some of the main issues relating to human settlements, (b) to give the countries of each region an opportunity to articulate their individual position with respect to human settlements and (c) to exchange views and information among the countries of the region.

24. Apart from their collaboration in the organization of these meetings, the secretariats of the regional commissions are expected to make a valuable contribution to the preparation of policy papers and background documentation for HABITAT.

25. The duration of each regional meeting would be about one week. A number of consultants as well as observers may be invited from outside the region together with representatives of the specialized agencies and other members of the United Nations system who may be in a position to contribute working papers and/or facilitate the discussions at the meeting.

26. Close contacts have been established with the Economic Commission for Europe in the light of this Commission's long experience in the field of human settlement. It has been proposed that a part of the September 1975 regular meeting of the ECE Housing, Building and Planning Committee would be devoted to HABITAT, which, in a sense, would constitute the regional meeting for the ECE countries. It has also been agreed that ECE would undertake to prepare a paper reviewing ECE policies and experience in the field of human settlements over the last 25 years.

E. Induction seminar

27. An induction seminar was held from 20 to 23 September 1974 for the representatives of the regional economic commissions, the newly recruited staff members, and Conference consultants. Participants were briefed on the objectives of the Conference and the progress of the preparatory process. Extensive discussions on the substantive framework of the Conference and the time-table of the preparatory activities took place as a result of which several important modifications have been made in the proposed framework and time-table.

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28. The Secretary-General of the Conference addressed the meeting and emphasized the continuous nature of the Conference preparations and the importance of the active participation of all Member States. He also briefed the participants on the responses of the countries covered by his visits so far.

29. The representatives of regional economic commissions pointed out important issues relating to human settlements in their respective regions. Views were exchanged on the organization, timing and participation of the regional meetings.

F. Participation of non-governmental organizations

30. The active participation of non-governmental organizations is essential in order to achieve the appropriate impact and follow-through on which the success of the Conference depends. Both the General Assembly and the Governing Council of UNEP have stressed this basic need and the United Nations Secretariat has taken steps to activate this co-operation.

31. It is therefore envisaged that a parallel meeting, similar to the Stockholm Environment Conference Forum and the Bucharest Population Conference Tribune would be organized at the time of the Conference. At such a meeting, the concerns, proposals and expertise of all the non-governmental organizations and groups could be expressed and transmitted to the official sessions of the Conference. Likewise the deliberations of the Conference could be made available on a systematic basis to the non-governmental organizations represented in Vancouver.

32. The Conference on NGOs in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council and the NGO Working Group on Human Settlements have been approached by the secretariat and have accepted joint responsibility for the establishment of a planning and management committee whose purpose it would be to assist NGOs in contributing to the preparations of the Conference and more specifically to co-ordinate and organize the parallel NGO activities.

G. Host country arrangements

33. The Conference secretariat has held a series of meetings with the host Government officials to co-ordinate plans for the anticipated requirements of the Conference, and to prepare a draft agreement setting forth the respective responsibilities of the United Nations and of the Government of Canada (see A/CONF.70/PC/10). To that effect, the Secretary-General of the Conference and his Deputy as well as other United Nations officials concerned have inspected proposed facilities in Vancouver. Based on these visits, detailed planning is now under way to equip four conference halls and related meeting rooms and to provide various host facilities and services such as reception, transport, security, hospitality, etc.

34. The host Government, in addition to assuming the usual responsibilities required by General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) of 16 December 1969, has offered to co-operate in other activities that are likely to make the holding of the Conference a meaningful event to the widest possible range of interests.

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H. Information programme

35. A first mailing of Conference-related material was made to professionals interested in human settlements and to the world media in November 1974. The newsletter announces the purpose of the Conference and the tentative time-table of major events leading to Vancouver. The secretariat has also compiled a list of some 15,000 names of persons with a direct interest in Conference issues.

36. Active support and co-operation for the Conference information programme is being provided by the United Nations Office of Public Information. The secretariat information staff held a series of meetings with their counterparts in the Office of Public Information for the planning of the programme outlined in document A/CONF.70/PC/8.

I. Administrative and financial matters

37. At its twenty-eighth session, the General Assembly approved an appropriation of \$1,717,000 from the regular budget of the United Nations for the United Nations Conference-Exposition on Human Settlements for the biennium 1974-1975. 8/ The calculation of this amount, which had been reduced from the original estimate of \$2,016,800 for the Conference component on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), was then based on the understanding that a portion of the costs, especially as regards the exposition and preparatory process, would be met by the UNEP Environment Fund in accordance with decision 4 B (I) of the Governing Council of UNEP. 9/

38. At the time the financial implications for the Conference were submitted to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General noted the possibility of reducing the estimates of the basic cost of the Conference as a result of contributions which could be made by organizational units within the United Nations, and considered it desirable that the final determination in this regard be made with the participation of the Secretary-General of the Conference, who had not at that time been appointed and after the Preparatory Committee had had an opportunity to clarify and define further the objectives of the Conference. It was also observed that the precise determination of the work that the United Nations could carry out from within its own resources would depend on decisions concerning the 1974-1975 biennium budget, which was at that time under consideration by the General Assembly. 10/

8/ Official Records of the General Assembly: Twenty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 6 B (A/9006/Add.2), Programme budget for the biennium 1974-1975, sect. 16, United Nations Environment Programme.

9/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 25, annex I.

10/ See document A/9238, para. 47.

39. Following the first session of the Preparatory Committee, the Secretary-General will accordingly review the estimate of the resources required for the Conference in 1976, bearing in mind the 1973 ACABQ recommendation that the initial estimate of \$1,048,100 for 1976 be reduced by \$150,000 11/ as well as the observations of ACABQ concerning requirements for temporary staff and for consultants' services.

40. In this connexion, it may be noted that extensive consultations have been carried out with the various organizational units within the United Nations concerned with the subject-matter of the Conference, with regard to their respective contributions to the preparatory work for the Conference. As a result of these discussions and of the co-operation offered by several of the substantive units concerned, utilization of 1974 consultant funds was appreciably below the initial estimates, and it is anticipated that similar co-operation will assist in achieving corresponding reductions in the course of 1975. On the other hand, owing to their own heavy programme responsibilities, it did not prove possible for existing organizational units to make staff resources available to the Conference secretariat in 1974, and thus to reduce expenditures on temporary assistance. Under-expenditure on temporary assistance during 1974 is attributable primarily to delays in recruitment resulting from difficulties in identifying candidates with the required expertise who were willing to interrupt their careers for appointments of a relatively short duration. By the end of 1974, almost all posts on the approved manning table had either been filled or appointments were in the final processing stage. Equivalent savings for temporary assistance cannot therefore be anticipated in 1975 under the regular budget allotment.

41. The Governing Council of UNEP, in pursuance of the decision taken at its first session agreed at its second session to participate in the financing of the exposition element of the Conference-Exposition and to that end requested the Executive Director of UNEP to submit a complete budget to its third session in March 1975; the Governing Council further authorized the Executive Director to use a sum of not more than \$1.5 million for 1974 and 1975 from the resources apportioned to the area of human settlements, health, habitat and well-being. 12/

42. Following completion of the appropriate project document, in October 1974 an amount of \$230,000 was allotted by the Environment Fund of UNEP for 1974, with the remainder of \$1,270,000 approved for allotment on 1 January 1975. In accordance with the request of the Governing Council of UNEP, a progress report on the status of the implementation of the project will be presented to its third session, together with a financial status report on the utilization of 1974 UNEP funds and the complete budget for the years 1975 and 1976.

11/ See document A/9008/Add.23.

12/ UNEP/GC/26, annex II, decision 15 (II), United Nations Conference-Exposition on Human Settlements.