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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

REPORT ON THE SIXTY-FIRST SESSION

Addendum

REPORT ON THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

(Geneva, 19 September 2000)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministers of housing and spatial planning met in Geneva on 19 September 2000 under the auspices of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements.

The Ministers and Heads of Delegation from 37 ECE member countries discussed and adopted the ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century, with the principal goal of giving the ECE Committee on Human Settlements high-level policy guidance for its future work, in order to promote the sustainable development of human settlements, foster economic and social prosperity, support democratic governance and improve the quality of life for the whole population in the ECE region. The Strategy reflects the views of ECE Governments that living conditions and urban problems are multidimensional and should be considered in a broader context of economic and social development, environmental protection, peace and security. The participants felt that the Strategy could help ECE to define areas of specific competence to address human settlements challenges through a comprehensive approach, while ensuring synergies within ECE and with other international organizations.

The Ministers adopted the Ministerial Declaration (annex). The Declaration recognizes the significant role of cities and towns in generating knowledge and economic development. It also acknowledges that global environmental problems cannot be resolved without improving environmental performance in urban areas. It stresses the need to continue reforming the urban and housing sectors through securing effective legal, economic and institutional capacities of central and local authorities and improving conditions for public and private investments in the built environment. The Ministers urged the ECE Committee on Human Settlements to promote further the sharing of experience on good governance and management practices in urban and spatial planning among all ECE member countries and to share best practices within the programme activities of the Committee.

They further decided that this Declaration and the Strategy would constitute the ECE contribution to the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the review and appraisal of progress in the global implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and would facilitate further cooperation between ECE and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS).

Introduction

1. The Ministerial Meeting took place at the Palais des Nations, Geneva (Switzerland), on 19 September 2000.
2. Ministers and representatives from the following countries participated: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States of America.
3. A representative of the European Commission participated.
4. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) was represented. The following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended: Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Institut de recherche sur l'environnement, International Federation for Housing and Planning, International Real Estate Federation, International Society of City and Regional Planning, International Union of Tenants, Union Internationale de la Propriété Immobilière, and World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination.
5. Members of the Housing and Urban Management Advisory Network of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements also attended.

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

6. Mr. J. Zetter (United Kingdom), Chairman of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements, opened the meeting.

7. Ms. D. Hübner, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, welcomed the participants. She stressed that the urban problems in the region and in the rest of the world could not be solved just by acknowledging them. What was needed were new ideas, new national and regional strategies, new policies and new instruments for their implementation. Despite the differences in the ECE region, similar goals and objectives could be pursued, with widely different approaches and tools. Ms. Hübner made reference to the ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century, which would constitute a useful guide for the future activities of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements.

8. Ms. Beverley Hughes (United Kingdom), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, and Mr. László Miklos (Slovakia), Minister of the Environment, were elected as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson respectively.

II. DISCUSSION ON THE ECE STRATEGY AND ADOPTION OF THE MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

9. Mr. J. Zetter, introduced the ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century (HBP/1999/4/Rev.1).

10. In the ensuing discussion, the Ministers and their representatives exchanged views on the content of the Strategy and its relationship to national strategies, policies, goals and challenges. They identified the major trends and developments affecting human settlements and put forward the many goals and challenges to which the Committee should direct its attention.

11. Ms. A. Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UNCHS (Habitat), reported on the process leading up to Istanbul+5 and on the activities to mobilize partnership and further promote the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. She stated that the ECE Strategy was an important step for the future implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the ECE region.

12. The Meeting adopted the Strategy as a guide for the ECE Committee on Human Settlements to structure and adapt its future work programme. The Meeting also adopted the Ministerial Declaration (see annex below).

III. CONCLUSIONS OF THE DISCUSSION ON THE ECE STRATEGY

13. The concept of sustainable human settlements is about building sustainable communities. In this process, social, economic and environmental needs have to be balanced and met.

14. Meaningful democratic governance. There is a need to decentralize government and build up strong local governance. There are different ways of achieving decentralized and democratic governance, such as promoting transparency, integrity, accountability and efficiency and encouraging more citizen and community involvement. Good governance also implies a strong role for the private sector as a source of opportunities, expertise on financing and market demands and mechanisms. Partnership between public, private, voluntary sectors and local citizens is the strongest foundation for democratic decision-making and successful development.

15. Integrated approach. Human settlements problems and solutions must be tackled in an integrated way, if sustainable development is to be achieved. This means not only addressing the physical environment, but also balancing that with social, economic, cultural and environmental factors (see also para. 13 above). Therefore, the five challenges in the ECE Strategy cannot be compartmentalized; they must be addressed together in a comprehensive manner and also be interrelated with other ECE activities. This integrated approach can also help to achieve a balanced spatial distribution of settlements. Countries face very different problems and issues in territorial distribution because of historical, geographic, economic and demographic factors, including migration. However, both the rural and urban populations strive for the same quality of life. Therefore, spatial planning at a more strategic and regional level is required to secure an equitable provision of services everywhere and to look at the relationship between rural and urban areas within a given region.

16. Housing and urban sector reforms. For all countries and especially those in transition, reform in the housing sector is a key element in the national economy and provides a basis for improving housing provision. Legislation plays a key role in some countries, but it is not enough on its own. It requires a good institutional set-up to enforce and implement it. Social housing is an important element in housing policies and there are various ways of approaching it. However, better integration of new social housing and private housing is needed.

17. Social cohesion is a theme underlying many issues such as urban regeneration, democratic governance and citizen participation. All of our actions should strive to achieve social inclusion, especially for women and ethnic minorities, and a decent quality of life for all. The aim is that everyone should have the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential, through access to high-quality public services, education and employment opportunities, decent housing and good local environment.

18. Improving land and real estate markets. Land registration is a topical issue for all countries, whether they are introducing new registration systems or updating and modernizing already established ones. Land registration provides the basis for efficient spatial planning, for the protection of State property, including environmentally sensitive areas, for population mobility, and for the development of property and housing markets.

19. Future role of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements. The discussion demonstrates the value of exchanging ideas about important policy issues, but it also shows that the Committee does more than just float ideas. It achieves results. It is clear that there is keen support for the Committee's work. It is now up to its member countries to agree which actions the Committee should pursue most vigorously in the coming years and reflect in its programme of work. Finally, the Strategy provides a valuable contribution to the Istanbul +5 process.

IV. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

20. Ms. B. Hughes summarized the main issues that the Ministers and their representatives had raised during the debate, thanked the participants for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Annex

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION
TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE IMPROVEMENT IN LIVING CONDITIONS
IN THE ECE REGION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction

1. Urban and rural living conditions are an essential part of national and international policies to achieve economic, social and cultural development, environmental protection, and peace and security, and should take into account the requirements of sustainable development. There is great expectation that a new world can be built through solidarity and cooperation within and between countries.
2. European integration and the transition process in central and eastern Europe are generating a sense of great opportunity and should create hope for the people of the ECE member States. A better quality of life will be achieved if global and integrated approaches and local sustainable development strategies can be implemented in a concrete and credible way through cooperation within a new framework of partnerships at all levels and between different social partners.
3. It is essential that the experience of democratic societies in reducing inequality, fighting social exclusion and territorial segregation, particularly reversing the cumulative processes tending to impoverish and marginalize some areas, and in promoting and fostering sustainable urban development, affordable housing, real property rights and democratic values should be shared by all parts of the region. In this context, the ECE Committee on Human Settlements is a key forum for international cooperation in the ECE region to share views, experiences and best practices, and to develop sound approaches to urban and rural settlement issues as well as innovative and sustainable policies and programmes.

MAIN ISSUES

4. The ECE countries face significant challenges in promoting housing reforms. Adequate and affordable housing for all is a prerequisite for achieving social equity, improving the quality of life and strengthening role of families in a non-discriminatory way.* Governments in cooperation with major stakeholders should design and implement policies that set targets for the public sector while using markets in a flexible and innovative manner. There is a need to manage and develop human settlements structures that are sustainable, build more and better housing and new infrastructure, provide adequate services while avoiding urban sprawl, and adapt the existing building stock in a resource-efficient way.
5. In most ECE countries housing finance today is integrated into the larger capital market and is increasingly based on private-sector funds. As a result, housing must compete with other

* The delegation of Poland withdrew from this wording.

demands for capital. Nonetheless, central governments continue to maintain a strong presence to ensure the provision of decent, affordable housing through different types of public mortgage loan programmes and subsidy systems.

6. To provide adequate and affordable housing for all, it is important to strike a balance between private and public housing. The division of responsibility between public and private sectors varies from country to country depending on the housing policy goals, the institutional set-up and the viability of institutions and actors. There is always a need for the public sector to contribute to creating a legislative framework, controlling economic instruments and correcting market imperfections, as well as providing different types of measures in order to promote access to adequate shelter and services for population groups whose problems the market alone cannot solve.

7. An integrative planning approach on national, regional and local levels is essential for achieving the sustainable development of human settlements from an economic, social, cultural and environmental protection point of view. In this context, prevention, mitigation and response measures are of particular significance in minimizing the impact of natural disasters affecting human settlements.

8. Urban renewal is a major instrument for upgrading the quality of life in towns and cities. Revitalizing urban areas requires considerable financial resources. New funding sources need to be identified in the form of public/private partnerships. Attention should be given to the use of revenues from privatization for public investment, the use of commercial rent revenue either directly or as a collateral for loans, and attracting non-residential functions that can more fully meet the cost of renewal, without expelling the original inhabitants.

9. The critical issues are how to improve environmental performance and resolve the conflicts between the pressure for development and the conservation of our countryside, cities and towns, particularly our cultural heritage. Existing human settlements, historic sites and monuments provide a link to our past, teach us lessons for the future, and provide a context within which new development should be placed. In many countries housing areas have historical value and should be treated accordingly. Improving urban environmental performance depends crucially on integrated actions encompassing economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions.

10. A framework of land and property laws that recognizes the rights and duties of individuals, but also the shared concerns of the wider community, is essential. Sound land administration promotes an active real estate market and productive and sustainable land use. It facilitates the security of tenure and the development of a mortgage market on which a functioning economy depends. Principles that promote equal and effective access to property for all people, in urban and rural areas, while respecting the national and local needs and sensitivities, need to be articulated.

11. Good governance at local level needs to promote democratic approaches. This entails citizens' participation to raise awareness of individual and community needs and responsibilities,

and partnerships of State and local authorities with all actors involved, such as NGOs and the private sector. Poverty and social exclusion, especially exclusion based on gender or ethnic origin, are a particular concern.

12. ECE countries have different histories, cultures and built environments, but they share common aspirations for social equity, economic development and environmental protection. They therefore have to cooperate and exchange information and experience. Comparing practices and points of view will help them to better understand the action to be taken to solve problems and realize opportunities. Therefore,

WE, MINISTERS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION ATTENDING
THE 61ST SESSION OF THE ECE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN GENEVA
ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2000,

Aware that globalization, European integration and the transition processes in central and eastern Europe have profoundly affected the social fabric in the ECE region and will continue to do so by both intensifying competition and creating new opportunities and challenges for cooperation among cities of all sizes,

Convinced that policies on social cohesion and security in human settlements contribute significantly to political stability and conflict resolution,

Taking into account the region's demographic trends, characterized by ageing populations and by an increase in migratory movements of all kinds,

Recognizing that, particularly where powers and resources have been devolved to local authorities, cities and towns have a significant role in generating knowledge and economic development, and also as places for investment in commercial property and housing, with their related social, cultural and technical infrastructure,

Recognizing also that global environmental problems cannot be resolved without improving environmental performance in urban areas, in all parts of the ECE region,

Mindful of the need to continue reforming the urban and housing sectors through securing effective legal, economic and institutional capacities of central and local authorities and improving the conditions for public and private investment in the built environment,

1. Emphasize the importance of sustainable urban development, including sustainable housing and building programmes and sustainable transport strategies, and of changing consumption and production patterns in the ECE region in achieving a gradual change in attitudes at all levels of government and on the part of individuals and the business community;

2. Commit ourselves to promoting well balanced housing policies in cooperation with major stakeholders to achieve adequate and affordable housing for all and stress the importance of a well functioning housing market and the fact that, without proper public measures, housing

policy goals cannot be reached;

3. Support ECE land administration activities aimed at modernizing or establishing effective systems for the registration of private rights to land and of real-estate transfers;
4. Decide to promote the further sharing of experience of good governance and management practices in urban and spatial planning and housing among all ECE member countries and to share best practices;
5. Adopt the ECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21st Century, so that the ECE Committee on Human Settlements can use it as the basis for its future programmes of work in order to promote the sustainable development of human settlements in the ECE region, foster economic and social prosperity, support democratic governance and improve the quality of life for the whole population;
6. Decide that this declaration and the ECE Strategy will constitute the ECE contribution to the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the review and appraisal of progress in the global implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and will be the basis for continuing cooperation between ECE and UNCHS (Habitat);
7. Expect that the Istanbul +5 process will expand the audience for the Habitat Agenda and will also clearly identify successes, failures and constraints in its implementation so as to guide future actions and strengthen policy dialogues and exchanges of good practices at all levels.

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