



Economic and Social Council

Provisional

3 October 2000

Original: English

Substantive session of 2000

Coordination segment

Provisional summary record of the 21st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 July 2000 at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Pfanzelter (Vice-President). (Austria)

Contents

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the themes

- (b) Coordinated implementation by the United Nations system of the Habitat Agenda (*continued*)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

*In the absence of Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia),
Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the themes

(b) Coordinated implementation by the United Nations system of the Habitat Agenda

(continued) (A/54/855-E/2000/44 and A/55/83-E/2000/62)

1. **Ms. Singh** (India) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement of the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. In its approach to sustainable development of human settlements, India had recognized the interdependence of urban and rural areas and the need to address both simultaneously. Its national housing policy also recognized that shelter and development were mutually supportive, and that housing formed an important part of the strategy for poverty alleviation and employment generation. "Housing for all" was a priority item on the national agenda.

2. The Government had set as a target the construction of two million houses every year, with emphasis on sheltering the poor and deprived. Direct Government intervention and financial support was available to improve the housing situation of the poorest, with the aim of eradicating homelessness, improving inadequate housing and providing basic services. The Government was seeking to create an enabling environment for housing activity through removal of constraints and development of an efficient and equitable system for delivery of housing inputs, including access to developed land, building materials, finance and technology. It was encouraging the use of energy-efficient construction materials and methods. Since loss of lives and housing stock from earthquakes, cyclones and floods was a serious problem in India, the Government was also promoting disaster-mitigation techniques for new construction and reinforcement of existing dwellings.

3. It had combined that integrated approach with an emphasis on participation and decentralization and created partnerships with local governments, the private sector and other actors. The national report on

housing was prepared through a participatory process involving extensive debate and consultation.

4. The approach to human settlements could not, of course, be divorced from general development. The provision of financial resources and technology transfer through international cooperation could bring about the sustained economic growth necessary to generate resources for investment in human settlements.

5. Having participated in the first session (in Nairobi in May) of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda, India advocated strengthening the capacity of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) as a focal point.

6. **Ms. Shafik** (World Bank) said that the commitments undertaken by the World Bank at the Istanbul United Nations Conference on Human Settlements had impelled the Bank to expand basic services to the urban poor on an unprecedented scale. The growing demand of cities and local governments for World Bank resources had led it to develop a new strategy shortly after the Conference. Its goal was to help create sustainable cities and towns that fulfilled the promise of development for their inhabitants by improving the lives of the poor and promoting equity, while contributing to the progress of the nation as a whole. The new strategy entailed a major paradigm shift for the Bank from working with central Governments to working with local governments, while applying the same holistic and rigorous analysis applied on the national level and linking poverty alleviation to urban growth. Many of the Bank's operating tactics had had to be adapted and mechanisms developed to provide operational and lending support at the local level.

7. The four major building blocks of the Bank's strategy were to scale-up slum upgrading; help cities develop their own strategies; make sure that national urban strategies were supportive of local plans; and expand assistance for capacity-building at the local level.

8. Achieving those goals would require collaboration among communities, levels of government and the private sector, as well as among external partners. Since the first two building blocks corresponded to the two main goals of the Habitat

Agenda, adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world, the World Bank had joined forces with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) to form the Cities Alliance, intended as an alliance between cities and their development partners to make a joint commitment to urban poverty reduction. So far the Alliance had 10 bilateral partners, including all the G-7 countries. The United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organization were actively considering joining. In December 1999 the Alliance launched its Cities Without Slums action plan with the ambitious target of improving the living conditions of over 100 million people over the next 20 years, focusing pragmatically on measures already known to improve slum living conditions.

9. The Bank had already gleaned a few lessons from its experiences. One was the importance of synergies when working with both local and central governments. The Bank had some experience now with municipal development funds, which were funds created on the national level, then lent to municipalities. The second was the importance of the work UNCHS was doing in developing indicators and monitoring progress towards Habitat Agenda targets. The third lesson was the discovery of the opportunities provided by the new information technologies. Using the example of the Saturday morning Internet chat room in which Latin American mayors exchanged information on successful approaches, the World Bank was going to introduce the idea in its Global Development Gateway. The fourth lesson was the importance of enlisting the participation of the private sector. The Bank had had some success, for example, in persuading water companies that they could, in fact, make money providing water to poor communities, which would nevertheless pay less than they would under more informal options. The last lesson was the importance of adopting a common strategy. The Cities Alliance had developed a common vision, and its partners were committed to harmonizing their efforts for maximum leverage. Success would ultimately depend on mobilizing a broad coalition of partners.

10. **The President** invited the representative of the NGO Committee on Human Settlements to address the Council.

11. **Ms. Townsend** (NGO Committee on Human Settlements) said that her Committee, a subsidiary

body of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council, wished to draw the Council's attention to the compendium of reports by NGOs with consultative status on their work to achieve Habitat Agenda goals. The non-governmental organizations that had contributed reports were: the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, International Architects Designers Planners for Social Responsibility, International Council for Caring Communities, International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, International Federation of Surveyors, International Real Estate Federation, International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, Olof Palme Peace Foundation, Rotary International, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, World Information Transfer and World Psychiatric Association.

12. Among the other NGO activities related to the Habitat Agenda was a worldwide study of living conditions of poor older persons in urban areas, conducted by members of the Committee with the cooperation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) through a series of case studies in 12 major world cities. A follow-up workshop proposed specific actions to extend the useful lives of older persons and to give them a stake in maintaining their shelter and community environments.

13. The Commission on Human Settlements at its seventeenth session in May 1999 had called upon member States, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly to undertake an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, to include local authorities and civil-society partners in their national coordination mechanisms and to enable least developed country civil-society partners to be fully involved in the preparatory process and the special session itself. Many NGOs and local authorities had manifested an interest in conducting such a review. Three major initiatives that were generated at the session were the launching of the Global Housing Foundation as a private/public sector partnership, the establishment of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements and a series of resolutions on effective management of land and property resources adopted by the International Federation of Surveyors.

14. The Shelter Forum group in Kenya deserved special mention for its consistent efforts to involve

youth worldwide in implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

15. In conjunction with the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session, the Human Settlements International NGO Caucus had been established representing the regional and sectoral diversity of civil society. The Caucus held briefing sessions, convened a round table and meetings of a facilitating group and a drafting group. Its chief organizational concerns were to maintain the level of accredited NGO representation and the participation procedures which had prevailed at the Conference in Istanbul.

16. The Caucus had been appreciative of efforts to upgrade the status of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and had expressed the hope that an NGO liaison service and resource unit might be established there. A recurrent issue for NGOs from the South was the need for financial resources in order to participate more fully in United Nations activities, particularly since the Internet was not sufficiently developed in their countries to replace face-to-face encounters. A study was planned on new modalities for funding. The Caucus had been recognized by UNCHS and communicated through its NGO unit.

17. The substantive concerns of the Caucus included affordable shelter with security of tenure, a significant reduction of homelessness, liveable cities, gainful livelihoods, capacity-building and participatory development. The Caucus was developing a work plan to be presented to the Preparatory Committee based on the common priorities of the Habitat Agenda and the two campaigns on security of tenure and urban governance. Most of the NGOs that had participated in Habitat II and members of the Caucus had entered into the spirit of partnership, which had been a novel feature of the Istanbul Conference. Many were already working with UNCHS, each other and the private sector on activities to further the goals of the new campaigns.

18. **Mr. Cobbett** (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT)) thanked the Council for its constructive comments and criticisms and said that they had shaped two main guidelines. One was the Council's stress on the importance of linkages between conference outcomes and the other was its insistence on better coordination between development partners.

19. The Centre regarded the five-year review of the Habitat Agenda as an opportunity not only to assess implementation but also to restate the importance of urban issues; an opportunity to stress concerns about the impact of demographic trends and the growth of urban poverty, to learn from five years' of efforts and to design new strategies.

20. The Centre in 2000 was learning to do business differently. It was adjusting to the challenges of the new paradigm exemplified by its work with the World Bank and the Cities Alliance. One of the key aspects of that new paradigm was that the real experts in urban poverty were the urban poor themselves, whose priorities needed to be better understood, a realization that was transforming strategies. Another key aspect was the role of women. All the evidence showed that the greater the role of women in setting agendas, the more likely a project was to achieve sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.