



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 August 2014

Original: English

Substantive session of 2014

Integration segment

Summary record of the 15th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 27 May 2014, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Drobnjak (Vice-President) (Croatia)

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In the absence of Mr. Sajdik (Austria), Mr. Drobnyak (Croatia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Sustainable urbanization (continued)

1. *A panel discussion on the topic “Cities as drivers of sustainable development”, moderated by Mr. Andrew Reynolds (United States of America), Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, was held. The panellists were Mr. Shri Karan Bir Singh Sidhu (Joint Secretary of Housing, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, India); Mr. Hans d’Orville (Assistant Director-General for Strategic Planning, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization); Ms. Saskia Sassen (Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology and Co-Chair of the Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University); Mr. Yang Kaizhong (Peking University); and Mr. Peter Calthorpe (Calthorpe Associates, Urban Designers, Planners, Architects) and the discussants were Mr. Günter Meinert (German Development Cooperation) and Ms. Lorena Zárate (Habitat International Coalition). Ms. Anka Mrak-Taritaš (Minister of Construction and Physical Planning, Croatia) delivered a keynote address. The panellists made presentations and an interactive discussion ensued, during which the discussants made statements.*

General debate

2. **Ms. Picco** (Observer for Monaco) said that Monaco was a city State with a territory of just 2 square kilometres, a resident population of 38,000, and a working population of some 50,000. Despite the challenges posed by that situation, every aspect of Government action was aimed at fostering the country’s sustainable economic development. Public works and projects were subject to strict environmental standards. Subsidies were available to homeowners wishing to replace fossil fuel heating systems with solar-powered systems. Despite high population density, sustainably managed green spaces had increased by a factor of five since the 1960s. Policies were in place to manage electricity demand and develop renewable energies. The public transportation system was designed to promote travel by bus, bicycle and on foot, and subsidies and incentives were provided to encourage the use of electric vehicles, including free access to recharging points in public car

parks. The private sector also played a key role in fostering sustainable development, and a special education week each year was used to raise pupils’ awareness of its importance. It was vital to share good practices in order to make urbanization a vehicle for achieving sustainable development.

3. **Mr. Grunditz** (Sweden), recalling that his delegation co-chaired the Group of Friends for Sustainable Cities, said that, if planned and managed correctly, urbanization could be a strong force for sustainable development. However, there was no single solution for all cities. Models for sustainable urbanization must take into account the specific circumstances and needs of each city and its citizens.

4. Over the next 30 years, an additional 3 billion people would join the global urban population. Urban strategies and investments were urgently needed to address the need for adequate housing, access to basic services and decent jobs, as well as challenges such as environmental degradation, waste management and energy access. An integrated and holistic approach to urbanization was essential, while inclusive and participatory decision-making mechanisms, democratic governance, equity and gender equality were also of vital importance in urban planning.

5. **Mr. Hoxha** (Albania), expressing his delegation’s solidarity with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia in the wake of the recent devastating floods, said that urbanization had historically been linked with industrialization and had meant more jobs, higher living standards, better transport and improved access to education and urban culture. However, in many cases, the path to urbanization had not been sustainable, resulting in poverty, inequality, slums, lack of access to basic services, crime, insecurity and inadequate waste management. In some parts of the world, pollution had become intolerable.

6. Sustainable urbanization was a key challenge for Albania, which had experienced rapid growth in its urban population, especially in coastal areas. Managing the fast pace of urbanization was a priority. Rapid urbanization compounded a number of inherited problems, such as the absence of a concept of private land ownership and a lack of institutional measures to create employment, foster social inclusion and ensure adequate and affordable housing for the new urban population. The emergence of an informal construction sector was adding to sustainable urbanization

challenges, while new urbanization patterns had also led to environmental degradation and the misuse of resources. Agricultural land had been diminished through the development of informal construction sites, which risked affecting the country's tourist potential. An uncoordinated approach to land management, planning and development had led to inefficient and unsustainable urban development policies. Bold steps were required to reverse the trend.

7. His Government's priorities were to implement good governance principles and restore control over land development; to strengthen and coordinate national and local planning processes in order to create a comprehensive framework for urban and economic development, based on the competing advantages of the regions and guaranteeing environmental protection and social inclusion; and to strengthen the role of local authorities as the primary managers of urban development, which would involve increasing their financial autonomy.

8. Existing informal urban sites would soon be legalized and urgent action would be taken to deal with challenges in those areas, including poor housing conditions and a lack of basic services.. Efforts would be made to improve waste incineration and to develop reuse and recycling schemes. Lawful, responsible land use was being promoted to avoid the problems of scarce public space and urban sprawl, which often absorbed agricultural land. Compact and mixed land use would encourage social diversity and bring employment opportunities closer to all. Public-private partnerships would also be strengthened to enhance protection of urban areas, especially along the coast.

9. **Mr. Maksimych** (Russian Federation) said that while the overall level of urbanization in the Russian Federation stood at 74 per cent, there were regional variations, with urbanization levels much higher in the north-western part of the country than in the North Caucasus. There were some 20 metropolitan areas with populations above 1 million. National programmes had been designed to support regions with special needs. Legal reforms to achieve sustainable urban development were under way, and an urban development road map had been developed.

10. His Government was working steadily to meet housing and infrastructure needs. A programme had been launched in 2008 to provide housing on a massive scale, and roads were being built to serve the new

neighbourhoods. Work was being done to address issues related to increased population density, safe water supply and sanitation facilities, waste processing and pollution. The national urban planning strategy was fully in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Among its priorities, his Government intended to develop a mortgage lending system, reduce housing costs by increasing the availability of affordable housing, provide more rental units and give Russian citizens the opportunity to improve their housing conditions at least once every 15 years.

11. In early June 2014, a briefing would be held in the city of Khanty-Mansiysk in order for local authorities from the Commonwealth of Independent States to prepare for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat-III).

12. **Mr. Mahmoud** (Observer for Egypt) said that, with the rural-urban drift occurring largely in developing countries, their foremost challenge was to create functioning cities that could provide their citizens with affordable access to adequate public services and employment opportunities.

13. Although Africa was the least urbanized continent, it had the world's highest urbanization rate. Its urban population had risen from 33 million in 1950 to 414 million in 2011 and was expected to reach 744 million by 2030. While urbanization could provide African countries with opportunities to achieve sustainable development, including economic growth, poverty reduction and service provision via economies of scale, rapid urbanization could also bring significant challenges.

14. All United Nations system organizations and other relevant stakeholders should play a constructive role in assisting developing countries to address the multiple challenges facing cities, and adequate resources should be mobilized for the attainment of development goals, including the MDGs, as well as relevant commitments contained in the Rio+20 outcome document. Sustainable urban development and human settlement required transformative policies at multiple levels of governance and a multisectoral approach that engaged relevant stakeholders. Interaction was needed between States at the international level, as well as between central and local governments at the national level. The private sector, civil society, foundations, academia and regional and

global networks of cities also played important roles in ensuring the sustainable development of cities. City planners should develop inclusive policies with people-centred objectives and participatory decision-making that included the disadvantaged and marginalized.

15. The approach to sustainable urbanization must be situated within holistic economic development policies that acknowledged the rural-urban continuum, including by creating better rural infrastructure, raising agricultural productivity and increasing rural income and employment opportunities in order to prevent reckless, unmanaged urbanization. Transport infrastructure projects in cities should include dedicated bus lanes and safe walking and cycling facilities, and should facilitate a move away from dependence on individual car use. Investments in such projects required a long time horizon and the international community must provide the necessary financial and technological support.

16. **Mr. Takahashi** (Japan), recalling that cities were responsible for 70 per cent of the world's total primary energy use and 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, while 60 per cent of the global population was expected to be living in cities by 2030, said that urbanization constituted a unique opportunity for transformation. If cities could be changed, sustainable development could be achieved. Since the problems of urbanization were closely linked to those of rural areas, a holistic approach that encompassed both urban and rural areas was essential.

17. Japan had experienced rapid urbanization during the twentieth century. In the 1960s, the city of Kita-Kyūshū had been one of the most heavily developed and polluted industrial areas in Japan. However, by the 1990s, it had been transformed; it received a Global 500 Award from the United Nations Environmental Programme and, in 2011, was listed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as a “green growth city”, while it remained one of the most industrialized cities in Japan, with high employment and low inequality. The key to such success stories was a collective effort in which all actors, including all levels of government, the private sector and civil society, were engaged. In that regard, the most important role of governments was to create an enabling environment for other stakeholders, including through the enactment of stable and sound legislation and the provision of appropriate incentives.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.