Economic and Social Council

Substantive session of 2014
Integration segment

Summary record of the 16th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 28 May 2014, at 10 a.m.

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

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Sustainable urbanization (*continued*)

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

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

1.   *A panel discussion on the topic "Urban prosperity and urban inequalities", moderated by Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlements Programme), was held. The panellists were Mr. Mpho Parks Tau (Mayor of Johannesburg, South Africa) (via video link); Mr. Paul Carrasco (Prefect of Azuay, Ecuador); Ms. Zoubida Allaoua (Acting Vice-President and Network Head, Sustainable Development, World Bank); and Ms. Carmen Griffiths (Executive Director, Construction Resource and Development Centre, Kingston, Jamaica) and the discussant was Mr. Michal Mlynár (Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations agencies in Nairobi and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme). The panellists and the discussant made statements and an interactive discussion ensued, during which the panellists responded to comments and questions from the moderator; the representatives of France and South Africa; representatives of the non-governmental organizations New Future Foundation and Association of Third World Studies, in consultative status with the Council; and invited representatives of the non-governmental organizations Council of European Municipalities and Regions and NGO Sustainability, Inc.*

Keynote address on the theme: "Urbanization as opportunity"

2.   **Mr. Paul Romer** (Professor of Economics, New York University Leonard N. Stern School of Business and Director of the New York University Stern Urbanization Project) said that it was appropriate to discuss the theme of urbanization as opportunity in New York City, where the landmark Ellis Island stood as the symbol of migration from rural areas to a city that offered unprecedented opportunity for millions to participate in the broad progress of all humanity. Though conditions in the city had been cramped at its peak density, the access to progress that it provided was what mattered most for migrants; it was a means of improving their lives and that of their children. It was easy to articulate the objectives of progress — inclusion, opportunity, dignity, accountability, transparency, and freedom from want and deprivation;

it was much more difficult to articulate how to start the process to attain those objectives.

3.   What must local or national governments do first to unleash the dynamic of progress? The careful study of urbanization and progress throughout history and around the world that he and his colleagues conducted provided clear answers and New York City itself was an example. The foundations for the progress that had improved immigrants' lives between 1911 and 2011 had been laid in the early 1800s, when forward-looking city leaders, predicting the arrival of millions of migrants, had decided to set aside empty land in Manhattan, to make it available as public space for transportation and other utilities. While those leaders could not have anticipated the development of modern technology, they had known that such public space would create valuable options for progress and opportunity. Thirty per cent of the total land surface in Midtown Manhattan was currently available for roads and sidewalks, a much higher percentage than would have emerged through informal development processes, which usually resulted in some 5 per cent of land being set aside for transport and utilities. Without that decision, the public spaces in Midtown would be as restricted as those of Lower Manhattan.

4.   He and his colleagues were working with cities around the world that were expected to experience population growth and expansion of the built-up area, so as to emulate the urban planning undertaken in 1811 in Manhattan, which had been followed by a sevenfold expansion of the city's built area. Though the land had been surveyed and set aside early on, streets had been built as needed over the next hundred years, creating room for the growth of the city and, thus, the conditions for progress.

5.   The challenge for the world was that such planning was needed on a massive scale, as approximately 5 billion people were expected to migrate to cities over the course of the next century. By default or by intention, urban leaders would need to set aside public space for newly built urban areas which would determine the configurations, mobility patterns and options that human beings would have to live with throughout their lives. As rapid urbanization would probably end in a hundred years' time, there was currently a unique window of opportunity to look ahead and create the same conditions for progress that had enabled the success of New York City. World leaders and opinion shapers must therefore think carefully

about the future of urbanization and what must be done to ensure that those objectives were attained.

General debate

6. **Mr. Llorentty Solíz** (Plurinational State of Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, as the international community looked towards a transformative global development agenda beyond 2015, it was important to recall that some 70 per cent of the world's population would live in cities by 2050 and that rural-urban drift in developing countries would compound their urban development challenges. Some 1 billion people lived in urban slums; the co-existence of such slums with modern high-rise buildings in many developing countries highlighted the issues of poverty and inequality, both of which should be given priority in the post-2015 development agenda. Recalling the conclusions of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) outcome document, it was the Group's view that cities, if well planned and developed holistically, including through integrated planning and management approaches, could promote the three dimensions of sustainable development, leading to sustainable urbanization. That required transformative policies at multiple levels of governance as well as a multisectoral, multi-stakeholder approach. New modalities of interaction between States at the international level and between central and local governments at the national level were therefore needed. Other non-State actors, including the private sector and civil society, also played important complementary roles in ensuring the sustainable development of cities that were responsive to inhabitants' needs. At the local level, inclusive policies that incorporated the disadvantaged and marginalized should be used to address urban development challenges.

7. Policies and development efforts targeted at poverty eradication and the provision of affordable housing, public infrastructure and economic opportunities must be at the heart of efforts to achieve sustainable urbanization. The United Nations system organizations and other relevant stakeholders should play a constructive role in assisting developing countries to address the multiple challenges facing cities. Adequate resources must be mobilized for the attainment of development goals such as those set out in the Habitat Agenda, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as well as relevant commitments contained in the Rio +20 outcome document. While significant efforts and progress had been made in implementing the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda, a number of pressing challenges remained, including rapid urbanization in large parts of the developing world, the continuing upsurge in the number of urban slum dwellers and the negative effects of environmental degradation on human settlements. Planned city extension methodologies should therefore be used to guide the sustainable development of cities experiencing rapid urban growth to prevent slum proliferation, enhance access to basic urban services, support inclusive housing and create employment opportunities as well as safe and healthy living conditions for all city dwellers.

8. Investment in transport infrastructure required long time horizons and international efforts must support developing countries in that regard. Such projects should not only focus on highways, but should include dedicated bus lanes and integrate safe walking and cycling facilities on urban road networks. A reduction in dependence on individual car use in favour of public transport and other sustainable, environmentally friendly modes of transport was also needed.

9. **Mr. Seksenbay** (Kazakhstan) said that it was important to recognize that urbanization was not just a shift from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society, but rather a dramatic change in production and consumption, human interaction with nature and the planet's carrying capacity, which affected all aspects of human existence. In addition to the dimensions of economic, social and ecological sustainability, it was important also to consider cultural, built-environment, and political sustainability. Cultural sustainability related to the added dimension of equality and justice, measuring the cultural adequacy of actions which should respect human dignity, values, traditions and practices of even the most vulnerable groups. Sustainability of the built environment referred to the concept of enhancing the liveability of buildings and urban infrastructure for all city dwellers, without damaging the urban environment, and also included a concern for the efficiency of the built environment in supporting the local economy. Political sustainability focused on the quality of governance systems, with an emphasis on strong leadership, division of responsibility,

transparency, innovation through new technologies, and democratic participation of all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society.

10. Sustainable urbanization could not be achieved in isolation, but must also support rural development, including through the provision or improvement of physical, economic and social infrastructure in small rural towns and service centres. Urban centres could be valuable markets for rural produce and serve as commercial, cultural, educational and technological hubs, driving economic growth and job creation and enriching the social and cultural fabric of rural areas.

11. Kazakhstan had developed a strategic plan for the sustainable development of its capital, Astana, by 2030, based on an objective long-term analysis of both the potential and the weaknesses of the city's economy, as well as its social, environmental and administrative systems. The main focus of the plan, which could be used as a model nationwide, was on improving quality of life in a newly created city where sustainable solutions could be more easily introduced than in older capitals. The plan had four interrelated development objectives relating to sustainable long-term economic development; environment and infrastructure; social development; and urban governance. Each had its own agenda and tangible measures for creating clusters in priority areas. The idea was to build capacity, healthy competition and a favourable investment climate. Furthermore, the plan would be assessed every five years until 2030, as would the effectiveness of public authorities in achieving strategic objectives and in implementing the balanced scorecard.

12. **Mr. Maso** (South Africa) said that the issues under discussion compelled the international community to seek innovative means of addressing lingering challenges to the Rio +20 objectives. In that regard, resident offices of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) should play a leading role in advising local governments on sustainable development policy. His Government's approach to effective policymaking and planning for sustainable urbanization had been to bring all key partners together in a cluster system, thereby facilitating project implementation. For example, in developing low-income housing, the Department of Human Settlements had successfully coordinated with other departments to secure free land, ensure access to safe drinking water and obtain assurances that the earmarked land was not in a protected area.

13. Rapid urban expansion continued to pose a major challenge for South Africa, where the concept of effective and sustainable urbanization encompassed both sustainable cities and human settlements. In accordance with the Constitution, which guaranteed the basic right of access to adequate housing for all citizens, his Government had adopted a comprehensive plan that promoted the creation of a non-racial, integrated society through the development of sustainable human settlements and quality housing. The upgrading of informal settlements included the provision of safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, access to roads, health facilities and schools, and refuse removal. The protection of home ownership provided the basis for economic development by enabling citizens to apply for loans to start businesses, which further encouraged job creation. Furthermore, ensuring universal access to land not only helped to alleviate poverty, but was also an attempt to move beyond the provision of basic shelter towards achieving the broader vision of sustainable human settlements and more efficient cities, towns and regions for all. South Africa, which had hosted the inaugural African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development, had also implemented a number of environmental initiatives, including the organization of waste picking for the resale of salvaged materials; an annual tree-planting event for communities, churches and schools; greening of parks; and cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Natural Sciences Sector to address acid drainage in abandoned mines.

14. **Mr. de Aguiar Patriota** (Brazil) said that rapid urbanization had created large cities plagued by poor infrastructure, precarious housing, and a lack of access to health, education and other basic services. Inequality also hindered sustainable development and poverty eradication. To address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, urbanization policies should address not only urban planning itself, including infrastructure, transportation and job creation, but also social challenges, through such actions as land tenure legalization, the curbing of informal settlements, and the provision of housing for the disenfranchised. A sustainable city was one that promoted social and environmental justice, which could be attained only through structural changes reversing historical economic inequalities, social exclusion and spatial segregation.

15. Brazil, where approximately 85 per cent of the population now lived in urban areas, had undergone a series of legal and constitutional reforms, culminating in a constitutional amendment that recognized the right to decent housing, including the right to be housed in an appropriate location, with adequate infrastructure and urban services. Since then, urban policies had taken a participatory approach that emphasized the cross-cutting nature of urban planning, while recognizing its capacity to promote social, economic and environmental sustainability. The second phase of his Government's Growth Acceleration Programme was focused on both city improvement and housing. While the measures of the former aimed to increase private and public investment in infrastructure, the latter focused on increasing direct investments and housing financing. The Programme had not only provided affordable housing to poor families but had also had a positive impact on the Brazilian economy.

16. The promotion of sustainable urbanization required significant funding, as well as complex policy and institutional planning at the local, regional and national levels that developing countries were not necessarily able to carry out. For that reason, support for developing countries, including technical capacity, technology transfers and financing, was essential, particularly in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

17. **Ms. Grignon** (Observer for Kenya) said that Kenya would continue to undergo rapid urbanization, which would play a crucial role in economic growth and job creation, social progress and environmental sustainability. Urban-based economic activities accounted for the majority of its gross domestic product, and continued to catalyse the development process in non-urban areas.

18. The Kenyan Constitution established the right to accessible and adequate housing, reasonable standards of sanitation, and clean, safe water in adequate quantities. Subnational entities had been established with the necessary financial autonomy to design and implement programmes to address specific challenges, including land use planning processes and secure land tenure systems. Furthermore, the Vision 2030 national development blueprint envisaged secure, well-governed, competitive and sustainable urban areas and cities that would contribute to the achievement of national development goals. The National Urban Development Policy had been elaborated to guide the

spatial allocation of resources and serve as a framework for the governance and management of urban areas. Her Government also offered incentives to attract private sector investment in affordable housing, and had spearheaded public-private partnership initiatives to address housing shortages in Kenyan cities.

19. Linkages with other sustainable development issues, such as the building of climate-change resilient infrastructure and urban settlements, were also crucial to achieving sustainable urbanization, and urban development models should integrate efforts to create economic prosperity with poverty alleviation and social inclusion measures. Sustainable urbanization should feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda, as proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

20. **Ms. Chikava** (Observer for Zimbabwe) said that her delegation supported the growing consensus in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals regarding the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on sustainable urbanization. Her Government was deeply committed to promoting sustainable urbanization, driven by economic growth, and was therefore working with local authorities to promote integrated approaches aimed at achieving economically, socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. To curb inequality, Zimbabwe had, among other measures, implemented the National Housing Policy, which harmonized the housing delivery system in urban areas, promoting the development of affordable climate-friendly housing , and sought to use that system as a mechanism to reduce poverty, create employment and eliminate gender disparities and social inequalities.

21. Local authorities required the support of national Governments and international partners to overcome urbanization challenges. Sustainable partnerships therefore needed to be developed with multilateral financial institutions, regional development banks, bilateral donors, the private sector and urban residents. Development partners were urged to finance public and private sector urban infrastructure projects in such areas as water supply, sanitation, waste management and housing, as well as to support rural development programmes with a view to reducing rural-urban migration. Public-private partnerships also had a crucial role in the provision of municipal infrastructure and the delivery of urban services.

22. Her Government was endeavouring to improve the quality of local governance by strengthening the institutional and human resource capacity of local authorities, particularly in terms of urban management and planning. It had given greater decision-making powers to local authorities and had implemented sustainable urbanization policies that were supportive of rural development. Although it was committed to improving service delivery in urban areas, the illegal economic sanctions against Zimbabwe had greatly restricted its efforts and the massive resource requirements of urban infrastructure investment imposed huge demands on its limited domestic resources. However, there could be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanization.

23. **Mr. Gave** (France) said that his delegation welcomed the choice of sustainable urbanization as the theme for the Council's first integration segment. Not only did urbanization affect all dimensions of sustainable development, but cities were a prime locus for democratic life. The two integration segments preceding the 2016 United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) would be of strategic importance for the development of an international agenda able to respond to the major challenges faced. His delegation therefore supported the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on inclusive and sustainable urbanization as one of the sustainable development goals.

24. Discussions on the post-2015 agenda to date had not taken sufficiently into account the strategic role played by local and regional authorities in sustainable urbanization. His Government therefore supported the work of the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments and suggested the inclusion of a specific target on capacity-building for local and regional governments. Urbanization should also be accompanied by urban and territorial planning. France supported the work of UN-Habitat in drafting International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, which were to be submitted for adoption at the agency's next Governing Council meeting in April 2015. Furthermore, cities had a crucial role to play in combating climate change. Particular attention should be given to energy efficiency in urban planning and the climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives of local and regional governments should be supported. In that regard, France was to host the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.

25. The approach taken to address inequality in urban areas should be broad, incorporating efforts to combat all forms of inequality, including the existence of pockets of poverty, unequal access to services, amenities and economic opportunity, and the absence of social integration; ecological transition, in particular by combating energy insecurity, which was one of the main factors compounding poverty; promotion of diversity and participation in all aspects of city life; and respect for history and culture, which were key for social cohesion. An integrated development strategy could only be fully implemented by local and regional governments. His Government's work through the French Alliance for Cities and Territorial Development was based on such a broad, cross-cutting approach.

26. **Ms. Stewart** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that job creation was a top priority for the world's cities, since employment led to economic and social development, as well as environmental sustainability. Given the scale and speed of urbanization, especially in developing countries, providing adequate employment, infrastructure and social protection in urban areas was a challenge. With increasing numbers of jobseekers unable to find decent work, the current situation of growing informality and poverty would become untenable if not properly addressed. Wealth, while often concentrated in urban areas, was unevenly distributed. In fact, urban poverty had begun to overtake rural poverty, increasing the vulnerability of urban workers, perpetuating such risks as food insecurity, lack of protection against disease, environmental hazards and crime, and restricting workers' ability to contribute fully to a productive economy and the greening of cities and towns. The ILO Decent Work Agenda was of central importance to achieving urban sustainability and addressing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

27. Experience had demonstrated that policies and interventions such as labour-intensive investment in infrastructure provided real opportunities for job creation in urban areas. Such an approach could be implemented using locally available resources and could produce three to five times more direct employment than conventional small- and medium-scale infrastructure methods. Labour-intensive and other job creation policies should be developed through a process of social dialogue, with respect for workers' rights and the provision of social protection, since such dialogue allowed workers, employers and the

Government jointly to discuss solutions to the challenges facing the urban labour market, including workers' frequently poor working and living conditions and inadequate health care.

28. Some 404 million new entrants, as well as 202 million unemployed persons, had to be integrated into the labour market over the next decade. To meet such a daunting challenge, proactive, employment-centred, inclusive growth strategies and coherent policy frameworks should continue to be promoted. In view of the persistent challenges and the need for concerted action, ILO suggested consideration of the question "How can decent work become the entry point for policy integration?" as the theme of the Council's 2015 integration segment.

29. **Mr. Reynolds** (United States of America), Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, said that the virtuous circle of combining science and technology, engineering and innovation with information and communication technologies could close technical and digital divides and lead to the achievement of the MDGs. The marginalized, particularly women and youth, must be engaged in that process and education was therefore crucial. University-to-university collaboration had been unleashed to a major extent in the last decade, thanks to the impact of information and communication technologies, and university students in the United States and Europe were engaging with their peers in developing countries to take forward the development process. In that regard, there was great potential to share data using science and technology assets, including satellite imagery, global positioning systems and geographic information systems. Such collaboration could also be used to foster the development of public-private partnerships, and was being harnessed by Engineers without Borders and other initiatives to address the challenges of infrastructure development and the expansion of urban environments. Young people should be involved in the solution-seeking process from a very early age.

30. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development had once again submitted draft resolutions for adoption by the Council, calling for action on those issues. Science, technology, engineering, innovation and information and communication technologies for development should be at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda because they strengthened the world's capacity to successfully address the sustainable development goals.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.