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HOUSING, BUILDING AND PLANNING

Note by the Secretary-General on the implementation of
General Assembly resolution 2036 (XX)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. During the twentieth session of the General Assembly concern was expressed at the fact that, at the close of the first half of the Development Decade, the housing situation in the developing countries continued to deteriorate and had, in fact, reached crisis proportions. Realizing the need of "mobilizing the efforts and resources of the nations" for a solution of the housing problem, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2036 (XX) on 7 December 1965, calling upon Member States to "assume a major role in the solution of the housing problem in every country". The resolution recommended the establishment or strengthening of the institutional framework for developing and enforcing all necessary measures for the solution of this problem and drew attention to specific subjects of crucial importance, such as the building materials industry, land ownership and land use, the training of professional and sub-professional cadres, etc. Furthermore, the resolution recommended certain subjects in the field of housing, building and planning towards which international bilateral and multilateral assistance to developing countries was to be directed.

2. The resolution also suggested that the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the executive secretaries of the regional economic commissions, prepare biennial progress reports on the application of this resolution. Finally, the General Assembly invited the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning to work out, on the basis of these biennial reports, additional measures for the implementation of the recommendations in this resolution.

3. The present note by the Secretary-General is intended to report on the steps taken to implement resolution 2036 (XX).

II. PREPARATORY ACTION BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

4. Since the resolution specifically referred to the housing problems in "every country" and since the substance of the resolution included practically the whole sector of housing, building and planning, a biennial report on the application of this resolution was tantamount to a world survey of housing policies and programmes. Partly in view of this task and partly in compliance with the suggestion made by the General Assembly that he co-operate closely with the regional economic commissions in the preparation of these biennial reports, it was the understanding of the Secretary-General that these reports should be based mainly on the surveys prepared or to be prepared by the regional economic commissions. Also, the views of the specialized agencies could be incorporated in these regional surveys through the collaboration of their regional offices where they exist, or in separate reports prepared by their headquarters staff. It was also noted that the Economic Commission for Europe was the only regional economic commission which regularly issued surveys in this field.

5. The questions relating to the preparation of these biennial reports were discussed by the Working Group on Housing and Urbanization of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) at its tenth session (February, 1966). The Working Group agreed with the understanding of the Secretary-General and recommended that the task of the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning should be to achieve a synthesis of regional surveys and other reports, and to emphasize elements or aspects which merited particular attention. Before the final publication of the report, the regional economic commissions and the specialized agencies should be asked to comment on aspects within their particular competence. It was noted, however, that some assistance to the regional economic commissions might be necessary to enable them to initiate routine biennial reporting on the situation in their respective regions. The Working Group further agreed that the biennial report should be a comprehensive world-wide study on the housing situation in order to be of full value to the United Nations and other international bodies and agencies in

planning their programme of assistance to developing countries. Also, the experience gained by the countries in compiling the basic data for the survey would undoubtedly help them in improving their own housing projections, programmes and techniques and thus facilitate their national development generally. The survey, furthermore, should deal with such major problems as the allocation of necessary resources within the framework of the national plans; co-ordination of housing construction at the national level; existing housing stock; estimation of housing needs; trends and policies in the field of housing; projection of the necessary extension of building industry and building materials capacities; cost of dwellings; annual expenditure of families for housing; use of land; employment in housing construction; training of the necessary number of technical personnel and workers for the implementation of the programmes; and levels and types of international assistance, both multilateral and bilateral.

6. In the interest of uniform reporting it was considered necessary that the Secretary-General should prepare guidelines for the preparation of these reports and have them approved by the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning. The Secretary-General consequently prepared these guidelines, as well as a draft outline of the biennial reports and a questionnaire to collect information on a uniform basis. After the Committee's approval, the draft outline and the questionnaire were to be finalized in collaboration with the regional economic commissions and the specialized agencies concerned; in particular, the co-operation of the World Health Organization (WHO) will be requested in the preparation of the chapter on communal (public) services, and that of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on vocational training in this field.

7. The Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, at its fourth session (September 1966), considered the report of the Secretary-General (E/C.6/48) on the arrangements proposed for the implementation of resolution 2036 (XX), including the draft outline of the proposed survey and a questionnaire. It was the feeling of the Committee that some developing countries might not be able to furnish the requested information and it was suggested that a detailed survey, along the lines indicated in document E/C.6/48, could be the basis of a quinquennial survey, the first issue of which might be undertaken in connexion with the preparation for the 1970 housing census. For a biennial report, it was considered desirable to

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concentrate on the most essential questions, such as the availability of shelter, land policy, finance, planning and design.

8. It was also pointed out that the proposed biennial survey met only part of the objects of resolution 2036 (XX). Some delegations felt that the more substantive elements of this resolution had not received sufficient attention and that additional work would have to be done to clarify the most pressing problems confronting the developing countries in this field. On the basis of additional information and study, priorities could be established regarding the scope and sequence of national and international efforts and programmes designed to create viable national institutions to deal with these problems. This point was taken up by a number of other delegations, who urged that the United Nations concentrate more on specific proposals for action in this field, and suggested that the objectives and terms of reference of the Committee itself should be examined and clarified so as to put into proper focus its future work and assistance to developing countries as called for in resolution 2036 (XX) and other decisions of the United Nations in this field. Among the areas that were felt to require immediate attention were the construction and building materials industries, assessment of natural and human resources of each country, the training of national personnel, the maintenance and improvement of existing housing stock, the development of sound land policies and the mobilization and allocation of international and national financial resources for investment in this sector.^{1/}

9. Following the sense of the Committee on this subject, a revised and abridged draft outline for biennial reports on the application of resolution 2036 (XX) has been prepared for the consideration of the Committee at its fifth session in document E/C.6/59, which also includes some observations and statistical data on the world housing situation. After the Committee's approval the draft outline and the questionnaire will be finalized in collaboration with the regional economic commissions and the specialized agencies concerned. The biennial report will also include information available through other sources, such as papers prepared for various regional and interregional seminars held or to be held in this

^{1/} See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 4 (E/4287), para. 32.

field, documents produced by the United Nations Statistical Office, a short survey of the social aspects of housing conducted in pursuit of Economic and Social Council resolution 1168 (XLI) and similar material at the disposal of the Secretary-General.

III. PARALLEL ACTION ON THE SUBSTANCE OF RESOLUTION 2036 (XX)

10. While preparations are under way for the compilation of the data required under resolution 2036 (XX), the substantive directives of this resolution, since they encompass most of the work programme of the United Nations in the field of housing, building and planning, are being implemented under various resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and progress reports are submitted regularly through the proper channels. Even after the General Assembly adopted resolution 2036 (XX), directives for specific programmes for the development of housing and community facilities and improvement in the general quality of human settlements have been laid down in Economic and Social Council resolutions^{2/} 1141 (XLI), 1166 (XLI), 1167 (XLI), 1168 (XLI) and 1170 (XLI), adopted at the Council's forty-first session and in resolutions^{3/} 1221 (XLII), 1222 (XLII), 1223 (XLII) and 1224 (XLII), adopted at its forty-second session.

2/ The Economic and Social Council resolutions here enumerated deal with the following subjects:

- 1141 (XLI): Research and training in regional development.
- 1166 (XLI): Establishment of the International Institute for Documentation on housing, building and planning.
- 1167 (XLI): Training and educational facilities in the field of housing, building and planning.
- 1168 (XLI): Social aspects of housing and urban development.
- 1170 (XLI): Financing of housing and community facilities.

3/ The Economic and Social Council resolutions here enumerated deal with the following subjects:

- 1221 (XLII): Urging international bodies to strengthen their activities in the field of housing, building and planning.
- 1222 (XLII): Rehabilitation and reconstruction following natural disasters.
- 1223 (XLII): Focusing world attention on housing, building and planning. It also asks the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning to consider the advisability of proclaiming an international housing year in this connexion.
- 1224 (XLII): Urging increased efforts to meet the goals of the Development Decade, with special emphasis on regional pilot projects.

These directives, along with earlier ones, form the basis of the work programme of the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning, including its programme of technical co-operation and advisory services to Member States. Some of the activities of the Centre which respond directly to the substantive stipulations of resolution 2036 (XX) are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

11. Time and again the resolutions of the United Nations have urged Governments to assume a major role in the field of housing; nevertheless, as noted by the General Assembly, achievements have fallen short of goals. In resolution 1223 (XLII), adopted on 6 June 1967, the Economic and Social Council, in order to assist Governments in mobilizing their resources and those of their peoples, asked the Secretary-General to prepare "recommendations on the most appropriate means:

"(a) To focus world-wide attention on the acute social and economic problems associated with the lack of adequate housing and community facilities, and the difficulties of rational development of rural and urban communities, particularly in the developing countries;

"(b) To mobilize world-wide action in the form of specific programmes designed to lead the way to practical plans for the development of housing and community facilities, particularly for those sectors of the population whose need is greatest, and to improve the general quality of human settlement;

"(c) To encourage Governments to give still greater attention and support to this sector in the formulation and implementation of their national development programmes."

The resolution also asked the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, "in considering the means to implement the Secretary-General's report, to consider the advisability of proclaiming an international housing year, and to submit its recommendations to the Commission for Social Development at its nineteenth session and to the Economic and Social Council at its forty-fourth session". The resolution endorsed the view that "imaginative public information campaigns" may be necessary to direct greater attention to this sector, and that "concerted action at the national and international level" was required to avoid continued deterioration of human settlements.

12. The Secretary-General has prepared comprehensive recommendations for the implementation of this resolution in document E/C.6/63, which will be considered by the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning at its fifth session in

October 1967, and subsequently by the Commission for Social Development and the Council. These recommendations include specific proposals for action by Member States, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and, of course, by the Secretary-General himself. Some of these proposals seek to mobilize action through all groups concerned with the housing problem, including the residents of sub-standard settlements. Action on these proposals will assist Member States in acting upon the most important recommendation of the General Assembly in resolution 2036 (XX), namely, in assuming "a major role in the solution of the housing problem". Furthermore, in order to assist Governments in collecting the basic data, which should be the proper foundation for housing programmes and policies, the United Nations has published two important reports this year: Methods of Estimating Housing Needs^{4/} and Principles and Recommendations for the 1970 Housing Censuses.^{5/}

13. The recommendation of the General Assembly in paragraph 1 (h) of resolution 2036 (XX) with respect to the establishment of central or other organizations or bodies in charge of housing and planning activities and empowered with the necessary authority has been a concern of the Secretary-General for a considerable time and constitutes one of the basic recommendations of the United Nations seminars in the field of housing, building and planning. The United Nations has, in fact, assisted Member States in establishing and servicing such organizations. The programme of training (discussed in paragraph 16 below) and fellowships awarded by the United Nations in this field have for one of their objects the training of nationals of recipient countries in administering such organizations.

14. The need of institutional framework for housing finance is sorely felt in developing countries, and fully recognized by the United Nations. Under Economic and Social Council resolution 1170 (XLI), the financing of housing has become one of the major fields of United Nations activity in the housing, building and planning factor. The United Nations has convened several advisory meetings of experts from different regions of the world to propose measures for stimulating the flow of

^{4/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 67.XVII.15.

^{5/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 67.XVII.4.

capital to housing. As the Secretary-General said in his progress report on the financing of housing prepared for the fifth session of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning (E/C.6/66, para. 2), "One of the major conclusions to emerge from the first meeting (1966) was the urgent need to establish suitable institutions and administrative and legal procedures to facilitate the mobilization of domestic capital in the developing countries themselves, and to encourage the flow of both private and public funds from capital-exporting countries. It was fully recognized, however, that international capital should be utilized primarily as a stimulant to assist in the mobilization of local resources, and should not be viewed as a primary source of project financing." The second meeting of experts (1967) dealt with institutional and legal measures necessary for the mobilization of savings and the extension of long-term credit and did not directly concern itself with housing policy as such, but it attempted to formulate general principles regarding the objectives and functions of an international institution for housing finance. A third advisory group meeting in 1968 will consider, primarily, methods of financing in centrally planned economies. It is hoped that the comprehensive report to be prepared after these meetings will be of singular usefulness to Governments in the formulation of policies and programmes to stimulate an increased flow of resources into the housing sector. It may be added here that increased governmental interest in obtaining assistance in the field of housing finance has been noted and that all expert advice on housing policies and programming, a major area of technical co-operation, takes into account questions of finance and institutional framework to implement housing policies.

15. The emphasis which is laid in paragraph 1 (c) of General Assembly resolution 2036 (XX) on the development of the building materials industry and the establishment of organizations which will improve efficiency, lower costs and establish designs and standards that are appropriate to the relevant cultural, social and economic requirements is fully reflected in the current activities of the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning. Under the joint programme with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Centre has issued several studies on the industrialization of building (E/C.6/70 and E/C.6/70/Add.1). The regional economic commissions have prepared or are preparing regional surveys of the building industry. With a view to improving the use of local building materials and traditional

building methods, the United Nations has prepared two studies on the organization of building operations in Africa and two similar studies concerning Latin America (summarized in document E/C.6/71). Another study, on the use of bamboo and reeds in house building, will be ready shortly. The development of modern techniques has received, if anything, even greater emphasis. The United Nations publications on "Modular Co-ordination in Building - Asia, Europe and the Americas"^{6/} and "Modular Co-ordination for African Countries" (TAO/Global/4) have been prepared for this purpose. A complementary study on modular design in low-cost housing, showing examples of the application of principles of modular co-ordination to low-cost housing in different countries, will be issued shortly. Recent and forthcoming regional and interregional meetings organized by the United Nations, mentioned below, also indicate the emphasis laid on the development of modern techniques:

- (i) Regional Seminar on Prefabrication in Building for the Latin American Region, held in Denmark in September 1967;
- (ii) International Symposium on Industrial Development, to be held in Greece in December 1967;
- (iii) Interregional Workshop on Administrative and Organizational Measures for Increasing Productivity in the Housing Construction and Building Materials Industry, to be held in the Soviet Union in 1968;
- (iv) Regional Seminar on Prefabrication in Building for the Asia and the Far East Region, to be held in Denmark in 1968;
- (v) A seminar on the present status and future prospects of the manufacture of building materials in the Asia and Far East region will be held in Bangkok in September-October 1967.

A study on low-cost house design was requested by the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning at its fourth session.^{7/} In a Progress Report (E/C.6/68), the Secretary-General has submitted for the consideration of the Committee a short-range and a long-range programme, along with an analysis of the problem of low-cost house design. It should be mentioned here that the development of building materials and a building materials industry is one of the major areas of technical co-operation in the housing, building and planning sector.

^{6/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 66.IV.4.

^{7/} See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 4 (E/4287).

16. Concerning the training of professional and sub-professional cadres, mentioned in paragraph 1 (d) of resolution 2036 (XX), the Secretary-General submitted for the consideration of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, at its fifth session, an extended outline (E/C.6/77) for the preparation of a comprehensive study on the "Training of national cadres and skilled personnel in the field of housing, building and planning" in compliance with Council resolution 1167 (XLI). This study will be addressed particularly to the needs of the developing countries and will cover existing policies and programmes, available facilities, personnel requirements, financial implications, avenues of international co-operation in this field, etc. It may be recalled that the question of promoting training, as well as research and documentation, has been the subject of several United Nations resolutions and is one of the permanent activities of the Secretariat. The Secretary-General has therefore submitted for the perusal of the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning a progress report on the subject (E/C.6/76). In addition, the Secretary-General has prepared studies on specialized fields in this general sector, e.g., research and training for regional development (E/C.6/73). Likewise, training of local cadres is one of the functions of building research centres organized in several countries with the assistance of the United Nations. Planning schools also have been established or strengthened in several countries, also with the assistance of the United Nations.

17. General Assembly resolution 2036 (XX) refers in paragraph 1 (e) to one of the most difficult problems in this entire sector, namely, the introduction of basic reforms in land ownership and land use. The United Nations has been occupied with the various problems of land use in the context of housing and urban development for some considerable time. A comprehensive study on urban land use and land control measures will shortly be ready and will cover the problems of the Latin American region in this field. Plans are being made, in consultation with the Economic Commission for Africa, for a similar study for the African region. Furthermore, the United Nations sponsored two seminars in the field of urbanization and urban and regional planning during the past year. A seminar on Planning for Urban and Regional Development, including Metropolitan Areas, New Towns, and Land Policies was held at Nagoya, Japan, in October 1966. The other was an Interregional Seminar on Development Policies and Planning in Relation to Urbanization which took place at Pittsburgh in October-November 1966. Both seminars

included topics falling under paragraph 1 (e) of this resolution. The Nagoya seminar, organized by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, made far-reaching recommendations on the subject of land policies, while offering no definite solutions. The Economic Commission for Europe organized a seminar on the Supply, Development and Allocation of Land for Housing and Related Purposes (see ST/ECE/HOU/15), held in Paris, in 1965. These seminars, like all others, generated a considerable amount of documentation pertaining to the region concerned. While the area of physical planning constitutes the largest segment of technical co-operation programmes in the field of housing, building and planning, it should be mentioned here that all expert advice in one form or another concerns land problems, so rightly emphasized here.

18. With reference to paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 2036 (XX), enumerating the subjects most suited for international assistance to developing countries, it will be noted that each item mentioned there has received attention in bilateral as well as multilateral programmes of international assistance. The problem, however, is not that certain important subjects in the field of housing have been neglected, even though each subject may not have received all the emphasis it deserves (rural housing, for instance). The problem is the insufficiency of the international effort in fields of recognized importance. The Secretary-General has prepared a document on funds expended in international programmes for housing, building and planning (E/C.6/80) indicating how multilateral and bilateral resources are being utilized in this sector. According to available information^{8/} over \$270 million has been supplied annually as international assistance in the housing sector, although some estimates make it as much as \$400 million. Of this figure, about 77 per cent comes through bilateral sources and about 23 per cent through multilateral sources. Of this total figure, 97 per cent comprises financial assistance (64 per cent loans, 20 per cent grants and 13 per cent investment guarantees); while 3 per cent is in the form of technical assistance. This total effort is estimated to be about one third of the minimum annual external assistance requirements of developing countries.^{9/}

^{8/} Estimates are for 1963, see E/C.6/80, table 12.

^{9/} See E/C.6/32, para. 32.

19. The share of housing, building and planning in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has risen some threefold since 1960. Yet, in 1966 it accounted for no more than 1.6 per cent of the total funds expended (excluding expenditures on programmes of the specialized agencies in related fields). In the same year, the regular programme of technical assistance and Funds-in-Trust maintained 185 experts in this field in fifty-seven countries at a total cost of over \$2.5 million. It has been noted over the years that not many technical assistance projects in this field deal with isolated government enterprises. In fact, there is a trend toward their development into larger pre-investment projects to be financed under the Special Fund component of UNDP. By the end of 1967 eleven projects will have qualified for assistance by the Special Fund, and some seven more may qualify in 1968.

20. This brief review of the United Nations activities which touch upon the substance of resolution 2036 (XX) makes it amply clear that the magnitude and the ramifications of the world housing problems are recognized and some effort is being made towards solving them. Concrete achievements in terms of improved shelter and general environment are alarmingly low, however. The targets for the housing sector stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Development Decade^{10/} called for the construction of ten dwelling units per 1,000 population. The fact is that few developing countries of the world have reached an output of over two dwelling units per 1,000 population.^{11/} As to the environmental conditions, to give but one example, more than 200 million persons are said to be short of drinking water and one hospital bed out of four in the world is occupied by a patient made ill by polluted water. The growing malaise in urban areas is looming larger every day.

21. It is recognized that problems of housing and urban development cannot be dissociated from the problems of economic growth. Yet, the role assigned to housing in the national development plans seems incongruous in the light of the fact that

^{10/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 62.II.B.2.

^{11/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/6303), para. 385.

40 to 70 per cent of total gross capital formation is represented by investment in construction (including dwellings) and a substantial percentage of the labour force belongs to this sector. In some quarters housing is still considered exclusively a welfare item or a consumption item and its role as a productive investment, which contributes to over-all productivity and which indirectly results in considerable savings to Governments in other fields, is not fully appreciated. Furthermore, one often hears the cliché "It is not the will that is lacking, it is the means" applied to housing and urban development. That developing countries are short of means and have many demands on their limited resources is a patent fact. Yet, the proper use of available means requires that housing be assigned its due role on purely economic grounds, to say nothing of its social and political implications.

22. Thus, while the General Assembly has very rightly urged Governments to assume a major role in the solution of the housing problem in resolution 2036 (XX), it seems that the means for doing so are emphasized in Economic and Social Council resolution 1223 (XLIII). The time seems to be ripe for concerted international action for "mobilizing the efforts and resources of the nations" and focusing world-wide attention on the problems and their solution (see paragraphs 11 and 12 above).
