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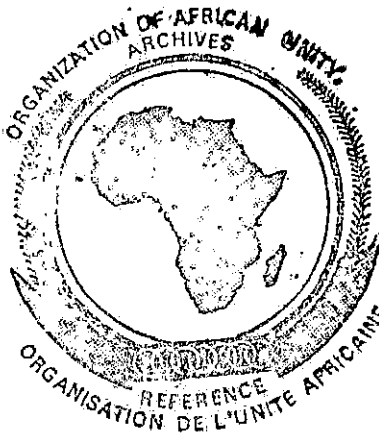
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Council of Ministers
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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE
CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS



CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
VANCOUVER, 31 MAY TO 11 JUNE 1976

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements "HABITAT" originated from a recommendation of the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment, held in Stockholm. The United Nations General Assembly which convened the Conference, affirmed that its main purpose "should be to serve as a practical means to exchange information about solutions to problems of human settlements against a broad background of environmental and other concerns which may lead to the formation of policies and actions by Governments and international organisations", - General Assembly resolution 3128 (XXVIII). This Conference, considered to be one of the four major UN Conferences in 1976; UNCTAD in Nairobi, Tripartite Conference on Employment in Geneva, Law of the Sea in New York and Habitat Conference in Vancouver.

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND PRE-CONFERENCE CONSULTATIONS

2. The Vancouver Conference was preceded by three Preparatory Committee meetings and regional preparatory meetings. The 1st Session of the Preparatory Committee was held in New York in January 1975; the Second Session was also held in New York during January 1976. The Third Session was held in Vancouver just before the Conference. The Preparatory Committee was consisting of 56 member States of the United Nations out of which 15 are Africans

3. The African regional Conference was held in Cairo, Egypt, in June 1975. A meeting of Ad Hoc Inter-governmental groups of experts on international co-operation and declaration of principles in the light of human settlements was held in Geneva during the month of September 1975.

4. Besides the various preparatory meetings, the Secretariat of the Habitat Conference had also consulted governments as well as UN and other international institutions.

5. The result of the above parleys and contacts were the various background papers that were presented to the Conference by the Habitat Secretariat. These include a proposed Declaration of Principle as well as programmes of international co-operation and recommendations for national actions.

HABITAT FORUM

6. Parallel with the official Conference, a Habitat Forum was held in Vancouver when private individuals and a broad section of non-governmental organisation interested in human settlements questions discussed the issues being debated at the United Nations official Conference.

7. During the 26th Session of the OAU Council of Ministers which was held in Addis Ababa 23-28 February 1976, the Ugandan delegation submitted for the consideration of the Council a memorandum entitled "United Nations Conference on Human Settlement; Proposal for an Institutional Arrangement", CM/731 (XXVI).

8. The Council deliberated on the entire question of the Vancouver Conference on Human Settlements. At the end of the deliberation the Council adopted the Resolution on the UN Conference on Human Settlements CM/Res. 467(XXVI). The Council of Ministers has indicated in the resolution adopted that human settlements issues involved physical, social, economic and environmental aspects of development which required a comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach. The Council having convinced that the magnitude of the global, regional and national functions of all arrangements for human settlement, require the setting up of an institutional organ different from that already existing in the UN system; recommended to the Conference the setting up of a new institutional organ entrusted with the responsibilities of assuming an over-all supervision of all activities regarding all aspects of human settlements. It also recommended that such an organ should integrate the UN Centre for Housing, Building and Planning and the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation. The Council also expressed the desire of the OAU to see the new organ located in an African country.

9. The General Secretariat of the OAU participated in the Habitat United Nations Conference for Human Settlements as an observer, having been invited in that capacity by the Habitat Secretariat. The OAU delegation at the Conference helped in coordinating the views of the African Group by arranging the meetings of the Group and holding individual consultations with members of the Group. The delegation also fully participated in the various negotiations that were held between the West European Group and the Group of 77.

10. The OAU delegation was as follows:

1. Mr. Mustafa SAM, Assistant Executive Secretary, New York Office;
2. Mr. Aziz FARAG, Social Affairs Officer, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs in the General Secretariat.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION AND DURATION

11. The Conference began as scheduled on May 31, 1976, and ended on June 11, 1976. Over 130 countries participated, forty of which are members of the OAU. The Liberation Movements recognized by OAU were also represented. UN Organs and Institutions as well as other inter-governmental organisations also attended the Conference.

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

12. The Conference was opened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations who in his speech stated that the Conference was part of the historic endeavour of the United Nations to establish new global strategies to meet global problems. The Organisation was not only reacting to existing crisis but was seeking to create a design for the future. The Governor-General of Canada, H.E. Mr. Jules Leger, and the Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliot Trudeau also addressed the Conference.

ELECTION OF THE BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE

13. The Canadian Minister of State for Urban Affairs was elected President of the Conference by acclamation. The Conference also elected thirty-three vice-presidents out of which eight were Africans. The African vice-presidents were from Congo, Gabon, Libyan Arab Republic, Mauritania, Nigeria, Uganda, Zaïre and Zambia.

14. The Conference elected the representative of Poland as the Rapporteur General of the Conference. The following Africans were also elected by acclamation in the three committees created by the Conference:

- Kenya - Chairman of Committee I
- Chad - Vice-Chairman of Committee II
- Swaziland - Vice-Chairman of Committee III

CONSTITUTION OF COMMITTEES

15. On the basis of the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee, the Conference established the following three Committees:

- (i) Committee I : to consider (a) the Declaration of Principles and (b) the Programmes for International Cooperation;
- (ii) Committee II : to consider recommendations for national action in the field of settlement policies and strategies;
- (iii) Committee III : to consider recommendation for national action to improve the aspects of settlements concerned with shelter, infrastructure and services

AFRICAN GROUP MEETINGS

16. The African Group met several times during the Conference under the Chairmanship of the Leader of the delegation of Liberia (Liberia holds the Chairmanship for the month of June at the United Nations) to discuss the only issue which the African delegations could not reach a common stand. The issue revolved around the question of establishment of an inter-governmental organ to serve as a focal point for human settlements action and coordination within the United Nations system. The meetings held by the Group were long and protracted.

17. Various points of view prevailed within the African Group as to the structure and linkage of the new organ with the existing United Nations Organs:

- (i) One point of view held by some delegation within the Group was that the new Organ, through it could have a separate Secretariat, should be responsible to the UNEP Governing Council. Those who support the establishment of the new Organ under the supervision of the UNEP reasoned that this was only to implement the OAU resolutions in view of the fact that if a new and independent Secretariat was established it had to go to a country outside Africa, pursuant to United Nations concept of equitable distribution of the Secretariat of United Nations organs, among the five regional groups. They recalled that during the debates of the location of the Secretariat of the UNEP, Nairobi competed with another non-African city. It would therefore, be difficult and rather unfair, they reasoned, to convince the other Third World delegations to locate the new Habitat Secretariat in Africa.

- (ii) A second point of view held by some delegations was that the existing UN organs which had been entrusted to deal with various aspects affecting Human Settlements had not done a satisfactory work. They would, therefore, support the establishment of a new and independent Secretariat which will have a clear mandate and will deal with issues concerning human settlements only.

18. The Group could not reach a decision on the question of the structure, and location of the Habitat Secretariat. All members of the Group did, however, adhere to the idea of establishment of a new intergovernmental organ on Human Settlements. The African Group in its last meeting reached the following consensus:

- (i) The African Group considers the OAU resolution (CM/Res.467) as its position, in principle;
- (ii) The Group recommends that the Conference gives to the consideration the objectives of the proposed International Organ on Human Settlements;
- (iii) The other issues (location of Secretariat, linkage and structure) should be submitted to the forthcoming OAU Summit in Mauritius which will hold its next meeting before the 31st Session of the General Assembly to give further instruction to the Group.

The implication of this decision was that the African Group will not oppose but will rather support a recommendation by the Habitat Conference for the establishment of an inter-governmental body for human settlements. However, it will not agree on recommendations by the Conference as to the actual structure, linkage or location of the new organ during this Conference. This should be left to the 31st Session of the General Assembly to decide.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

PLENARY

19. At the plenary Sessions, from May 31st to June 8th, 1976, Heads of official delegations made statements on their national policies and projects on Human Settlements, mentioned problems facing their countries, called for more international co-operation and assistance - particularly to the Third World - in connection with Human Settlements Programmes etc ...

20. One of the principal purposes of the Conference, mentioned before the Plenary, was to make more people acutely aware of the need to devise better forms of social organisations. The relevance of the following was emphasized :

- One third or more of the entire urban population of the developing world lives in slums and squatter settlements;
- A large percentage of the people of the less developed countries have no water within a hundred metres of their homes;
- More than a half of all the people in developing countries have no electricity in their homes.

21. Many delegations, at the Plenary, stressed the need to establish national policies on Human Settlements and new institutional arrangements to implement them. They also called for collective action by Governments and peoples.

Most of the speakers before the Plenary stressed the following three major issues:

- (i) Spiralling population growth and the resulting rural-urban imbalances caused by migration to the cities;
- (ii) The growth disparities in income within societies and regions;
- (iii) The lack of adequate controls over land use and urban growth.

Some delegations showed capsules and short films on Human Settlements projects in their countries.

VANCOUVER DECLARATION ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

22. This is a Committee I issue and has been a subject of long and protracted meetings and negotiations both in the Plenary of the Committee and informal working Group. The draft declaration which was presented by the Group of 77 follows the outline of a draft elaborated by the Habitat Secretariat prior to the Conference.

23. The West European and other Group which consist of mainly Western industrialized countries outrightly opposed the Group of 77's draft as they could not accept at the initial stage 13 out of the 55 paragraphs contained in the draft declaration. The West European Group did not accept all the paragraphs which referred to the existence of the New International Economic Order, the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of State, UNGA Res. 3281 (XXIX) and Transfer of Resources UNGA Res. (S VI) and UNGA Res. 3362 (S VII). It can be recalled that the Western European and other's did not subscribe to the above mentioned UN decisions which they were being taken in the General Assembly.

24. The West European and other Groups also did not accept the paragraphs in the declaration which in their point of view is political and not related to Habitat; such as displacement of people by colonial or occupying power. The Group of 77 vehemently reasoned that these issues were related to the Human Settlement problems.

25. The two Groups could not arrive at an agreement. The draft was finally put to vote and was adopted with a great majority. The East European Group supported and voted for the Draft declaration.

26. Among the points in the preamble of the Declaration, the Conference recognizes "that the circumstances of life for vast numbers of people in human settlements are unacceptable, particularly in developing countries, and that, unless positive concrete action is taken at national and international levels to find and implement solutions, these conditions are likely to be further aggravated". As factors aggravating the problem, the preamble singles out inequitable economic growth; social, economic, ecological and environmental deterioration; a world population growth which is expected to double the present population in the next 25 years; uncontrolled urbanization rural backwardness and dispersion; and "involuntary . . . , particularly politically, racially and economically motivated, relocation and expulsion of people from their national homeland".

27. In the section entitled "General principles", the Conference states that "the improvement of the quality of life of human beings is the first and most important objective of every human settlement policy. These policies must facilitate the rapid and continuous improvement in the quality of life of all people, beginning with the satisfaction of the basic needs of food, shelter, clean water, employment, health, education, training, social security without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, ideology, national or social origin or other cause, in a frame of freedom, dignity and social justice". In striving to achieve this objective, "priority must be given to the needs of the most disadvantaged people".

28. Another of the general principles states that "human dignity and the exercise of free choice consistent with over-all public welfare are basic rights which must be assured in every society. It is therefore the duty of all people and Governments to join the struggle against any form of colonialism, foreign aggression and occupation, domination, apartheid and all forms of racism and racial discrimination as referred to in resolutions as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations".

29. The Conference declared that "the establishment of settlements in territories occupied by force is illegal" and "is condemned by the international community". It noted, however, that "action still remains to be taken against the establishment of such settlements". It further declared that "the right of free movement and the right of each individual to choose the place of settlements within the domain of his own country should be recognized and safeguarded".

30. Among other general principles contained in the Declaration are these:

- "Every State has the right of exercise full and permanent sovereignty over its wealth, natural resources and economic activities, adopting the necessary measures for the planning and management of its resources, providing for the protection, preservation and enhancement of the environment".

- "To achieve universal progress in the quality of life, a fair and balanced structure of the economic relations between States has to be promoted. It is therefore essential to implement urgently the New International Economic Order, based on the Declaration and Programme of Action approved by the General Assembly in its sixth special session (1974), and on the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States" adopted by the Assembly in 1974.

- "The highest priority should be placed on the rehabilitation of expelled and homeless people who have been displaced by natural or man-made catastrophes, and especially by the act of foreign aggression. In the latter case, all countries have the duty to fully co-operate in order to guarantee that the parties involved allow the return of displaced persons to their homes and to give them the right to possess and enjoy their properties and belongings without interference."

- "Historical settlements, monuments and other items of national heritage, including religious heritage, should be safeguarded against any acts of aggression or abuse by the occupying Power".

- "Every State has the sovereign right to rule and exercise effective control over foreign investments, including the transnational corporations within its national jurisdiction, which affect directly or indirectly the human settlements programmes".

31. The Declaration was adopted by a roll-call vote of 89 in favour to 15 against, with 10 abstentions. Voting in favour were most of the developing and socialist countries. Voting against were : Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany (Federal Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom and United States. Abstaining were Austria, Colombia, Fiji, Japan, Paraguay, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

32. The countries voting against the Declaration said their primary objection was the inclusion of an implicit endorsement of General Assembly resolution 3379 (XXX) of November 1975, which characterized zionism as a form of racism.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION AND FUTURE UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITIES

33. This Group of issues did not create the type of animosity brought by the debate on the Declaration of principles. The only subject of contention which was the location and structure of the new international organ was deferred for further discussion at the 31st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. This is in line with the decision taken by the African Group as reported in a preceding paragraph.

34. The resolution on Habitat regarding programmes for international co-operation in regard to human settlements, as worked out in Committee I and adopted on the final day of the Conference, calls for the creation of an "intergovernmental body for human settlements", composed of not more than 58 States." Among the objectives of this body would be to help countries increase and improve their own efforts, to solve settlement problems, to promote greater international co-operation for increasing the resources available to developing countries, and to strengthen co-operation among developing countries.

35. The intergovernmental body would have among its main functions the development and promotion of policy objectives and priorities for United Nations programmes in this field, the monitoring of activities of the United Nations system and the study of new issues, problems and solutions relating to settlements. The body would also "exercise overall policy guidance and supervision" of the operations of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (which now functions under the United Nations Environment Programme).

36. The proposed body would report to the United Nations Economic and Social Council or to the General Assembly through the Council.

37. The recommendation of Habitat also calls for the establishment of a Secretariat "to serve as a focal point for human settlements action and co-ordination within the United Nations system". The Secretariat would "comprise the posts and budgetary resources of :

- (i) The Centre for Housing, Building and Planning of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs;
- (ii) The Section of UNEP's Division of Economic and Social Programmes directly concerned with human settlements, "with exception of the posts required by UNEP to exercise its responsibilities for the environmental aspects and consequences of human settlements planning";
- (iii) The United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation; and

- (iv) "As appropriate", selected posts and associated resources from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

38. In a section of the resolution on regional organizations, the Conference recommended that the five United Nations regional commissions - one of which is the Economic Commission for Africa - should consider the establishment "as soon as possible" of intergovernmental regional committees on human settlements. Also, "responsibility for implementing regional and subregional programmes should be gradually shifted to the regional organisations".

39. The Conference recommended that a decision on the question of leadership of the Secretariat, the organizational link and the location of the central secretariat, be left for the General Assembly at its 31st Session.

40. The Conference adopted two related resolutions without objection. The first of these recommends the convening of regional United Nations meetings, if possible before September, to establish guidelines for coordinating within each region the action to be taken in order to deal with settlements problems. The second requests a report this year to the General Assembly by the United Nations Secretary-General on the potential costs of the various organisational arrangements proposed for future United Nations activities concerned with settlements.

41. A separate resolution adopted by the Conference relating to future United Nations activities contains a recommendation that the General Assembly request the United Nations Secretary-General to submit a report to 32nd Session of the Assembly on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories.

42. The Conference also adopted a draft resolution sponsored by cross-section of participating countries which welcomes the convening of the United Nations Water Conference in Argentina in March 1977. The resolution urges all governments to participate fully in the United Nations Water Conference and in the preparatory process, including the regional meetings in order to ensure the achievement of its objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL ACTION

43. The Conference adopted a number of recommendations, concerning action to be taken at the national level to improve human settlements. Those recommendations were divided into six broad categories, namely, (i) settlement policies and strategies (ii) settlement planning; (iii) shelter infrastructure and services; (iv) land; (v) public participation and (vi) institutions and management.

(i) Settlement Policies and Strategies

The Conference adopted seven recommendations on this topic which dealt with national settlement policies, their content and relationship to the distribution of population, the environment, economic and social development and the use of resources. The Conference stressed in one of the recommendations that a national policy on human settlement and the environment should be an integral part of any national economic and social development policy. In addition, it should establish priorities among regions and areas of a country, and "be led by public sector action."

Another recommendation was that all countries should establish as a matter of urgency a national policy on human settlements.

(ii) Settlement Planning

Regarding this subject, sixteen recommendations were adopted at the Conference by consensus. An additional paragraph which was added on the proposal of Cuba, had to be voted for due to the opposition of the West European Group and others: The additional paragraph stated that settlement planning and implementation for the purpose of prolonging and consolidating occupation and subjugations in territories and lands acquired through coercion and intimidation must not be undertaken, and must be condemned as a violation of United Nations principles and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

The Conference recommended that planning and development of rural settlements should become a focus of national development policies and programmes.

The Conference further recommended that "settlement planning should reflect national, regional and local priorities and use models based on indigenous values. "Particular mention was made to employment opportunities and social justice. In regard to regional planning, Habitat recommended that planning for rural areas should aim to stimulate their economic and social institutions, improve general living conditions, and overcome disadvantages of scattered populations.

On urban expansion, the conference recommended that it be "planned within a regional framework and coordinated with urban renewal to achieve comparable living conditions in old and new areas.

The Conference further recommended that "neighbourhood planning should give special attention to the social qualities and provision of facilities, services and amenities, "with particular emphasis on the needs of children and their parents, the elderly and the handicapped.

(iii) Shelter, Infrastructure and Services

On this topic, the Conference approved eighteen recommendations, dealing with such questions as national housing policies, waste management and prevention of pollution, energy, water supply and social services. "Infrastructure" was defined as the networks designed to deliver or remove people, goods, energy or information including transport and communications. This was made distinguished from "services" such as education, health, culture, welfare, recreation and nutrition.

As regards standards for shelter, infrastructure and services the Conference recommended that such standards should be "compatible with local resources, be evolutionary, realistic, and sufficiently adaptable to local culture and conditions, and be established by appropriate government bodies. "It was also recommended that use be made of available local materials and resources. The role of the informal "self-help" sector in meeting the housing needs of the less advantaged was emphasized.

The Habitat further recommended that national housing policies "must aim at providing adequate shelter and services to low income groups". On water supply, it was recommended that efforts be made to achieve "measurable qualitative and quantitative targets serving all the population by a certain

date". Water should be provided to urban and rural areas by 1990, if possible. The Conference also recommended that provision of services in rural areas will help to reduce migration to urban areas.

(iv) Land

The Habitat Conference adopted eight recommendations dealing with land as a basic component of human settlements. They included suggestions on land ownership, conservation and reclamation of land and other aspects of effective land management. The first of these recommendations described land as "a scarce resource whose management should be subject to public surveillance or control in the interest of the nation". The following recommendation was adopted by a roll-call vote: "In all occupied territories, changes in the demographic composition, or the transfer or uprooting of the native population, and the destruction of existing human settlement in these lands and/or the establishment of new settlements for intruders, is inadmissible".

The Conference further recommended and stressed the following points :

- (a) Change in the use of land, particularly from agricultural to urban, should be subject to public control and regulation;
- (b) past patterns of ownership rights, should be transformed to match the changing needs of society;
- (c) special attention be made to land fill, control of soil erosion and desertification.

(v) Public Participation

The Conference adopted six recommendations on public participation, stating that a co-operative effort of the people and their Governments is a "prerequisite for effective action on human settlement".

The Conference further recommended that public participation should be "an indispensable element" in "planning strategies formulation, implementation and management".

These implementations emphasized the following points:

- (a) human settlements planning process must be designed to allow maximum public participation;
- (b) public participation is a right to be accorded to all segments of population;
- (c) recognition of people's role in transforming society, particularly role of women;
- (d) public participation should influence all decisions concerning management of human settlements, and should focus on the application of resources to improvement of the standard of living and the quality of life.

(vi) Institutions and Management

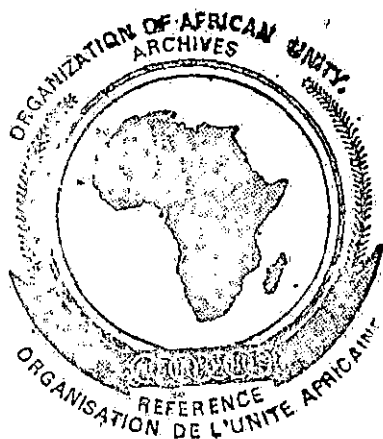
Ten recommendations covering questions such as adaptation to changing circumstances, the use of human resources, financial arrangements and settlement laws and regulations, were adopted at the Conference.

Habitat recommended that settlement institutions must exist at the levels of Government which are "responsible for the formulation and implementation of settlement policies and strategies for national economic and social development and environmental plans and policies, and interrelated on a multidisciplinary basis".

One recommendation stressed the need to establish the management responsibilities of government and to prevent speculation over the basic needs of people. It called for efforts by Government and inhabitants to maintain, restore and improve settlements.

A recommendation dealing with financial arrangements stated that "separate financial institutions and adequate means are necessary to meet the requirements of human settlements". It proposed that investors and purchasers, especially the least advantaged, be protected against inflation", through monetary and other means".

In addition, there was a call for the streamlining of institutions and procedures "to ensure that intended beneficiaries receive the largest possible share of resources and benefits". Finally, noting that existing laws and regulations "are often complex, rigid and dominated by vested interests", the Conference recommended that "any framework for settlements legislation must establish clear and realistic direction and means for implementation of policies. Emphasis was placed on periodic revision of laws and regulations.



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