United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Address to the Second Committee of the 68th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

Agenda Item 20

Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

By

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to appear before you today to introduce the Secretary-General’s reports on human settlements.

You have before you two reports by the Secretary-General. The first report, A/68/332, is entitled “Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and the strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme”, prepared pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 67/216.

The second document, E/2013/68, is on the “Coordinated Implementation of the Habitat Agenda”. This was presented to the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council of 2013 and transmitted to this Committee pursuant to resolution E/2013/L.36.

Before you is also the report of the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat held in April 2013, A/68/8.

In this introductory statement, I would like to start by highlighting important resolutions adopted by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat at its twenty-fourth session held from 15 to 19 April 2013. I will then provide an update on preparations for Habitat III, the third United Nations Conference on housing and sustainable urban development. I will also provide an update on the UN-Habitat governance review process. Finally, I will say a few words about a number of UN-Habitat events and outputs since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/216.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

The Governing Council of UN-Habitat adopted fifteen resolutions during its twenty-fourth session held in April this year. At this stage, I would like to highlight only two key resolutions, one of which requires a specific decision from the General Assembly. I will highlight a third resolution when I turn to Habitat III.

The first key resolution that I would like to highlight is resolution 24/15, which is on the “Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 and the Work Programme and Budget of UN-Habitat for the biennium 2014-2015”.

By this resolution, the Governing Council approved UN-Habitat’s new strategic plan for the period 2014-2019 and the work programme and budget for the biennium 2014-2015.

As you may recall, UN-Habitat’s new Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 succeeds the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) for 2008-2013. The new plan has seven focus areas:

- First, Urban Legislation, Land and Governance;
- Second, Urban Planning and Design;
- Third, Urban Economy and Municipal Finance;
- Fourth, Urban Basic Services;
- Fifth, Housing and Slum Upgrading;
- Sixth, Risk Reduction and Rehabilitation; and
- Seventh, Research and Capacity Development.

The plan has four cross-cutting issues, which are: gender; youth; climate change; and human rights.
The strategic plan has a clear results framework, with expected accomplishments (or results) and indicators of achievement. The strategic plan also makes provision for revision of its content at the end of 2016, following the adoption of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda at the end of 2015 and the holding of Habitat III in 2016.

For the first time, the strategic plan, programme budget and organizational structure of UN-Habitat are fully aligned. The seven focus areas of the strategic plan are identical to the seven subprogrammes of the programme budget. In addition, both the strategic plan and the programme budget are fully aligned with the seven thematic branches that are at the core of the new organizational structure of UN-Habitat.

With these changes, UN-Habitat is looking for an increased focus on the most relevant issues of adequate and sustainable urbanization. It also aims at efficiency in reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Likewise, the approach that the strategic plan favours will facilitate more specialized and highly professionalized support to national governments and local authorities that are faced with the difficult challenges of proper urbanization.

The second Governing Council resolution that I would like to highlight is resolution 24/1, which is on “World Cities Day”. By this resolution, the Council decided to recommend to the General Assembly that, beginning in 2014, 31 October of every year should be designated as World Cities Day.

This resolution was based on the recognition of the fact that more than 50 per cent of the global population is now urban, and of the increasing importance of urbanization in economic growth and environmental sustainability.

It is my hope that at the end of your deliberations on the human settlements agenda item, you will make a specific decision on the proposed World Cities Day.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

Permit me to now turn to the third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III).

As you will recall, through resolution 67/216, the General Assembly requested me in my capacity as Secretary-General of Habitat III to prepare a proposal on how best to provide inputs for and support to the preparatory process of the conference, and to proceed accordingly. That proposal was to be considered by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat at its twenty-fourth session.

I presented a proposal to the Governing Council accompanied by a roadmap and draft budget.

An estimated amount of $12,861,300 was foreseen for the Habitat III preparatory process and the conference itself. Of this amount, $9,073,100 would be mobilized for the Habitat III trust fund and $3,788,200 would be requested from the regular budget.

Of the amount to be requested from the regular budget, $95,000 would be required in 2013 and $2,611,400 for the biennium 2014-2015. The remaining amount of $1,081,800 would be required for the biennium 2016-2017. It is my hope that this Committee will lend its support to our request for these regular budget resources.

In my proposal to the Governing Council, I suggested that UN-Habitat, with assistance from the United Nations system as a whole, should provide the following inputs and support in the preparation of documentation for the preparatory process of Habitat III:
(a) First, assist countries to carry out assessments leading to the preparation of their Habitat III national reports;

(b) Second, lead the preparation of regional synthesis reports, based on national reports, using the expertise of the United Nations system as a whole; and

(c) Third, lead the preparation of a global report synthesizing the results of national and regional assessments.

In my proposal, I also suggested that UN-Habitat, with assistance from the United Nations system as a whole, should coordinate the organization of a number of meetings and dialogues between June 2013 and March 2015 as part of the Habitat III preparatory process. These would include two global virtual dialogues or meetings, one global meeting to be held during the seventh session of the World Urban Forum, and five regional meetings. Three of these regional meetings would be held alongside already planned regional ministerial conferences on housing and urban development, specifically in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Governing Council adopted resolution 24/14, titled “Inputs for and support to the preparatory process of Habitat III”. Through this resolution, the Council requested me, as the Habitat III Secretary-General, to prepare a number of additional documents, including guidelines and format for the preparation of Habitat III national reports.

The resolution also called upon Member States to strengthen National Habitat Committees; and to prepare Habitat III national reports before September 2014.

In addition, the resolution called upon me, in my capacity as the Habitat III Secretary-General, to prepare, with the support of UN system organizations, Habitat III regional and global reports based on country reports.

Since April 2013, UN-Habitat has prepared guidelines for the preparation of Habitat III national reports. The guidelines benefitted from the inputs of Member States, UN system organizations and Habitat Agenda Partners, as well as from a global e-dialogue held from the end of August to early September.

In addition, I have established an Interagency Coordinating Committee for Habitat III. This was established on 3 July 2013 at a meeting held in Geneva.

Finally, the documents required for the operationalization of the Habitat III trust fund have been prepared and submitted to the Office of the Controller. These documents include a consolidated Habitat III budget. It is expected that the Habitat III trust fund will be operational in the next few days.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

I would now like to provide you with an update on the UN-Habitat governance review process.

In response to Governing Council resolution 23/13 of 2011, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat (CPR) established an open-ended consultative group on governance review to oversee the process.

During the first quarter of 2012, all four task force teams that had been established completed their work and submitted their findings and proposals to the CPR at its forty-fourth regular session, held on 3 April 2012.
The Consultative Group decided at that stage that UN-Habitat should recruit a consultant to compile a comparative analysis report and a report on governance options.

The report on governance reform options was submitted to the CPR on 19 December 2012 for comments and amendments. The report set out four governance reform options:

- Firstly, a managerial/incremental reform option;
- Secondly, a universal membership option;
- Thirdly, an executive board option; and
- Fourthly, a combined hybrid option.

At the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council in April of this year, Member States could not agree on the governance reform.

Following this, the President of the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council offered to explore, in consultation with the CPR, how to narrow the differences among member States and how to proceed with the governance review process.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

With respect to the financial position of UN-Habitat during the reporting period, I would like to inform you that income projections for the biennium 2012-2013 remained at US$60.4 million for non-earmarked income and US$283 million for earmarked income.

As at 30 September 2013, US$54.3 million (or 90 per cent of the projection) had been received in non-earmarked income, while US$288.1 million (or 102 per cent of the projection) had been received in earmarked income.

From these figures, it is clear that there is increasing demand by Member States for UN-Habitat’s technical assistance services, especially by the Least Developed Countries. This has increased our overhead income in recent years. But we have seen a decrease in non-earmarked contributions.

We have taken a number of actions in response to the financial position of UN-Habitat. During the first quarter of 2013, UN-Habitat developed a resource mobilization strategy and action plan aimed at increasing sustainable non-earmarked funding for core activities from traditional donor countries, middle-income countries and non-traditional donors.

A new management framework, supported by new procedures and systems, has been established to enhance productivity, efficiency, transparency and accountability.

During the reporting period, we continued to control core expenditure through a wide range of measures, including reducing staff and non-staff costs. We have also established a cost allocation and recovery policy, in line with the principles outlined by the General Assembly in resolution 67/226.

All these steps are in addition to the overall reform of UN-Habitat that I reported to you last year. The reform, which we started in January 2011, has now been completed. As you may recall, the organizational review aims at enhancing project efficiency in the field, especially in the early stages of implementation; increasing productivity in the normative work performed at headquarters; enhancing coherence between normative and operational work; increasing transparency in UN-Habitat’s management and substantive work; and enhancing accountability at all levels.

In strategic terms, the organizational reform aims at enabling UN-Habitat to proactively support planned urbanisation as a source of socio-economic development, being the best strategy to tackle the challenges of urban poverty and inequality.
Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

During the reporting period, UN-Habitat organized a number of significant events and participated in a number of UN system-wide processes, and also produced a number of important products, a few of which I would like to highlight.

Throughout the reporting period, UN-Habitat continued to participate in key processes to shape the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, including the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The objective of UN-Habitat's engagement in the processes was to explain the role of sustainable urbanization and cities in sustainable national development and the contribution of local governments to sustainable development, as well as to highlight the need for continued and concerted focus on tackling the challenge of slums, as one of the symptoms of failed urbanization.

UN-Habitat organized the sixth session of the World Urban Forum, which was held in Naples in September 2012. The theme of the session was “The urban future”. More than 440 events were held, consisting of dialogues, round tables, special sessions, networking, training and parallel and side events. A total of 8,200 people from 152 countries participated. A major feature of the Forum was an international exhibition with 80 booths open to local people and registered participants.

During the reporting period, UN-Habitat published two flagship reports, the *State of the World’s Cities 2012/2013*, titled *Prosperity of Cities*, and the *Global Report on Human Settlements 2013*, titled *Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility*.

The *State of the World’s Cities 2012/2013* report proposes a fresh approach to prosperity, one that is holistic and integrated and that is essential for the promotion of collective well-being. The report also introduces a new tool, the city prosperity index, to measure the progress of cities towards prosperity.

The *Global Report on Human Settlements 2013* focuses on urban planning and design approaches that bring people and places together, by creating cities that focus on accessibility. The report also provides policy recommendations on sustainable and integrated land-use and mobility planning systems.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

I urge the General Assembly to make a decision on the recommendation of the UN-Habitat Governing Council to designate 31 October of every year, beginning in 2014, as World Cities Day.

I also urge the General Assembly to provide support to the search for ways of narrowing the differences among Member States on the UN-Habitat governance reform options in order to expedite the conclusion of the review process.

In addition, I urge the General Assembly to give strong support to the Habitat III preparatory process, especially with respect to the regular budget resources required for the 2014-2015 biennium. In this respect, I would like to emphasize that Habitat III is a United Nations conference and, as such, requires financial support that is additional to our normal recurrent needs.

Finally, and in the light of the financial trends that I have reported, I would like to appeal to all Member States to step up support to UN-Habitat through increased non-earmarked contributions to the Habitat Foundation in order to support the implementation of the recently approved strategic plan for the period 2014–2019. As you may recall, this strategic plan represents UN-Habitat’s new vision and programme priorities.

I thank you for your kind attention and will be glad to answer any questions that you might have.