

USA Statement During the Closing Plenary of the 24th Session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council

Thank you, Mr. President.

The United States has been a strong supporter of the mission of UN Habitat to deal with the challenges facing human settlements globally. Together with the international community, we note the progress made on the Istanbul Declaration of Human Settlements, while also recognizing the need for continue focus on the challenges of human settlements and urban development. As such, we look forward to working with the UN Secretariat and UN Habitat to ensure Habitat III has the most productive, efficient, and effective outcome possible.

To that end, the US is pleased to note the Governing Council's work this week on supporting UN Habitat's work in these areas, focusing on links to the post-2015 development agenda, its support for the Habitat III conference, and the updated global housing strategy. We are also pleased with the governing council's strong stance pushing UN Habitat to contribute to efforts to make our cities safer.

However, the US is disappointed at the disorganization this week—the very last minute resolutions, resource mobilization strategy, and budget implication information—that did not provide Member States sufficient information or adequate time to deliberate and make decisions. It caused unnecessary confusion and delay in important and difficult negotiations. I must also join with others in expressing our disappointment that we were unable to reach consensus on issues relating to strengthening this organization. We hoped that this meeting would be able to make progress toward more effective intergovernmental governance with much increased oversight of the organization. One option that would make use of the existing institutional framework is to expand the role and authority of the CPR. Such a step could give day-to-day oversight to the CPR and provide members with confidence, knowing that their funds are being utilized in the most efficient and effective fashion to deliver more results on the ground. We must find a way to work together in the future toward these ends.

At the same time, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the individual and collective efforts of various individuals who rose above these challenges to assist us in our undertakings here, in particular the President of the Council, who guided our deliberations with expertise, grace and humor. I also express my appreciation to my colleagues who took on duties as chairs of the various discussions. This is NOT an easy job, and their service is voluntary. They have my respect and thanks. I would also like to express my appreciation to the conference service staff and the UN Habitat professionals who moved outside their usual areas of expertise to help us with intergovernmental deliberations. One more thanks goes to the interns, other keyboardists and IT experts who took on the challenging tasks of documenting our outcomes, even when we changed our words multiple times throughout the night.

Returning to UN Habitat matters, we strongly believe in the need for greater transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. We would like to see a better information flow between the Secretariat and Member States on project activity reviews, financial reporting, and ongoing challenges faced by the organization. While we note the progress that the Executive Director has made in releasing additional reporting and information to the members, improvements are still needed to ensure that all Member States have an accurate picture of the state of UN Habitat and where its challenges are located.

Additionally, we note that much of the information had to be repeatedly requested of the Secretariat prior to the Governing Council and throughout the work of the CPR. We strongly believe that information when requested of the Secretariat should be provided in a timely fashion.

Budget discipline remains one of our highest priorities, particularly when financial information is lacking from an organization. On the future directions, we want to see UN Habitat strike an appropriate balance between “up-stream” normative work and field-based projects where their expertise and experience are based. To this end, we strongly encourage UN Habitat to stay within its approved mandate and to avoid controversial issues more appropriately handled by other mandated UN agencies, such as in the human rights arena. We recommend that while UN Habitat is experiencing financial difficulty, the organization should embrace its strengths for the betterment of urban populations globally as well as the organization itself.