Item 3:

Executive Director’s Briefing to the Committee of Permanent Representatives
Agenda Item 3: The Executive Director’s Briefing to the CPR

A. Preparations for the twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat to be held from 17-23 April 2015

A good part of the period of since the last Governing Council has been spent in preparing for the key events of the second Preparatory Committee for the Habitat III conference, and the Governing Council this April.

I have in recent weeks met with Member States, collectively and through meetings with all Regional Groups, to support the preparations for the Governing Council (GC), which is the last one before Habitat III. This is therefore a vital Governing Council, and I look forward to working with member states to position UN-Habitat in the most productive way possible for this vital conference. I hope that we will be able to collectively demonstrate during the GC that UN-Habitat has made serious progress in being the specialised programme for urbanisation in the UN, and that it has become much more efficient and effective. I also hope that we will be able to demonstrate a strong sense of forward and positive movement of UN-Habitat and the sustainable urbanisation agenda during the GC.

During meetings with member states, I have presented the views of the Secretariat on key emerging issues for the meeting, and exchanged views very constructively with member states on what they consider to be the most important issues and priorities – and how to achieve them. In my view, the main objective of this Governing Council is to help position and prepare UN-Habitat to be the main programme of the United Nations dealing with issue of urbanization, emerging from the Habitat III conference. As we all know, the many challenges of urbanization in all the regions of the world have become more numerous, and complex. It is vital that the UN has the right Programme to address these issues in collaboration with member states. A further area of relevance can be seen in the fundamental role of sustainable urbanization for sustainable development, and in addressing climate change.

With the new Strategic Plan and its implementation, UN-Habitat has developed the focus, expertise and knowledge to address the most common challenges of poor urbanization, such as weak planning, insufficient governance and legal frameworks, inadequate capacity of local authorities to finance, operate and deliver basic services, and weak coordination mechanisms of different levels of government.

This Governing Council offers an important chance to discuss and endorse the first year of the implementation of the strategic plan, and to approve how we move forward in our second biennium. The first item on the agenda of the Governing Council is the deliberations on UN-Habitat’s Work Programme and Budget for the biennium 2016-2017. I am confident that, following the process of consultation with the CPR, the Governing Council will be well-informed to discuss the draft document. I hope that we can find a way in the context of this or other resolutions to address comprehensively with the entire Council the question of financing of our Work Programme, to further advance the objectives given to UN-Habitat.
A second key priority for the Secretariat is to obtain support to make further advances in the implementation of our Strategic Plan 2014-2019, which should seek to continue the programmatic development in core focus areas of Urban Legislation, Urban Planning and Design, Urban Economy and Urban Basic Services. This is being put forward in the form of an ‘omnibus’ resolution. We have been looking for ‘new’ roles and responsibilities, whether for UN-Habitat or member states. I hope that within the context of this resolution, we have a chance in the Governing Council to comprehensively debate the ‘three-legged approach’ to sustainable urbanisation.

A third key priority is to strengthen UN-Habitat’s tools and instruments for delivery of its activities, particularly in the field. There are two important components in this area. One is to strengthen our partnerships with national and local authorities and seek full ownership of our projects and programmes in the countries, as well as align our strategic objectives with national development priorities. In this area, it is also important to ensure that country activities are fully embedded in and aligned with regional thinking and strategy. The second component is to encourage UN-Habitat and the Secretariat to find ways to improve efficiency in its delivery of field projects. We hope to work with your backing with the UN Secretariat to provide a set of rules and procedures for UN-Habitat that is suitable for technical cooperation in the field.

Special theme: I welcome the prospect of the special theme debate on how UN-Habitat can support the post-2015 development agenda. We also have an important opportunity to address the critical issue of the linkage between rural and urban areas in the context of sustainable urban development.

As the preparatory process for Habitat III is now advancing well, it would be relevant to also discuss how UN-Habitat can continue to provide support as a lead UN agency on sustainable urbanization, and how GC members can also support this process.

I have greatly appreciated the leadership of the two co-facilitators from United States and Nigeria on the discussions on UN-Habitat’s governance structure. We will continue to provide facilitation and support where requested, with a view to reaching an amicable and consensual agreement on this important issue.

I would also reiterate an overall priority: that the Governing Council can discuss how UN-Habitat can be better equipped with sufficient resources to deliver on its activities as set out in the Work Programme and Budget. There are a number of ways that Member States can be engaged in this regard, and further proposals can be discussed in the run-up to the meeting.

B. Missions and Engagement with member States

Many Members of the CPR participated in the field visit to Rwanda that took place from 23-24 February. I would like to deeply express our gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for its warm hospitality and great support in ensuring that the visit was informative and memorable for all of us who participated.
I believe it is safe to say that we all learned a lot from the visit, and all were pleased with the practical insight they got into the close and substantive collaboration between the national Government, Districts and UN-Habitat.

Building on our long-standing relationship with Rwanda for more than twenty years, I believe there is still a lot we can do by working together with the Government in moving towards making urbanization in the country more sustainable, and I would like to express my readiness to continue our partnership in this regard.

I visited Germany from 27-28 January and met with relevant Government officials, including in the Federal Environment Minister and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, to further our relationship with the German government. I also met with the Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, the Mayor of Berlin, and other partners. The visit was very successful in furthering our dialogue with the German government, following their contribution of core resources to UN-Habitat in 2014 and 2015.

I visited Khartoum, Republic of Sudan, from 21-22 January, on the invitation of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Physical Development. During my stay in Khartoum, I held technical discussions with Sudanese government on ways to support the Government in enhancing their approaches to urban planning and design. I signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry and discussed the national preparations for Habitat III. I also met with officials of the Darfur Regional Authority to discuss our projects in the region. I was very pleased with how the government is embracing a more comprehensive approach to urbanization along the principles advocated for by UN-Habitat.

I look forward to working intensively with the CPR in the coming month and hope we can all ensure the success of the Governing Council.