Item 3:
Executive Director’s Briefing to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (HSP/CPR/58/3):
Fifty-eighth Regular Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat (CPR)
Agenda Item 3: Executive Director’s Briefing to the CPR


UN-Habitat participated in the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from the 13th to the 15th of July 2015. In my capacity as Executive Director of UN-Habitat and as Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), I delivered a statement at the Plenary of the Conference. I also participated in Roundtable 6, which was on 16 July. That Roundtable was on “Ensuring policy coherence and an enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development”.

In my plenary statement, I emphasized that well-planned, well-financed and well-governed cities are engines of economic growth and job creation. I also highlighted the transformational force of urbanization. I further stated that, to bridge the urban finance gap, there must be commitment to finance urban development and recognition of the role of urbanization in development, and that there could be no sustainable development without sustainable urban development.

I concluded by outlining four focus areas recommended by UN-Habitat in order to enable local and subnational governments to provide the services they are expected to deliver:

- Firstly, a supportive governance and institutional environment, from the central level down;
- Secondly, an improved structure and administration of municipal revenues;
- Thirdly, strengthened financial management at the municipal level; and
- Fourthly, ability of local governments to access both domestic and international capital, including bond markets.

The outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development was the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which was endorsed by GA resolution, A/69/L.82. The Action Agenda is contained in the Annex of that resolution. The text in the Action Agenda that is most directly relevant to UN-Habitat’s work is contained in paragraph 34, which states:

“… 34. We further acknowledge that expenditures and investments in sustainable development are being devolved to the subnational level, which often lacks adequate technical and technological capacity, financing and support. We therefore commit to scaling up international cooperation to strengthen capacities of municipalities and other local authorities. We will support cities and local authorities of developing countries, particularly in least developed countries and small island developing States, in implementing resilient and environmentally sound infrastructure, including energy, transport, water and sanitation, and sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials. We will strive to support local governments in their efforts to
mobilize revenues as appropriate. We will enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and strengthen economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning, within the context of national sustainable development strategies. We will work to strengthen debt management, and where appropriate to establish or strengthen municipal bond markets, to help subnational authorities to finance necessary investments. We will also promote lending from financial institutions and development banks, along with risk mitigation mechanisms, such as the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, while managing currency risk. In these efforts, we will encourage the participation of local communities in decisions affecting their communities, such as in improving drinking water and sanitation management. By 2020, we will increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and resilience to disasters. We will develop and implement holistic disaster risk management at all levels in line with the Sendai Framework. In this regard, we will support national and local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks and risk management.”

Local authorities are also mentioned in paragraph 10, under global partnership for sustainable development, and paragraph 130 related to mechanisms for follow-up and review. In paragraph 13, member States also committed to “take action to fight malnutrition and hunger among the urban poor”.

B. Implementation of Umoja

UN-Habitat and its sister organisations in Nairobi, UNEP and UNON, have led the UN into a major new reform process. We have implemented an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system called Umoja, on time, and have managed to surprise the rest of the United Nations. Let me stress how difficult this process was. The United Nations is an immensely complicated organisation, with archaic systems, duplication of resources and offices, and great pressures and expectations from member states. The roll out of the new system took a huge effort from the three organisations, with hundreds of staff working seven days a week to achieve the change. The fact we did it is a testimony to the commitment of our staff. If we had failed, we would have stopped Umoja elsewhere in the UN. Our success is now being followed by others.

The reform that Umoja brings not only allows us to have a modern and functioning computer system, with greater accountability and efficiency. It offers an opportunity to transform the business. Here in Nairobi, we have the opportunity to strengthen and broaden our service model. The three Under-secretaries-general have been working very closely together to achieve this, to build on the atmosphere of cooperation we have developed, and to make Nairobi a strong and effective hub for the UN. If we get this right, I hope we can see Nairobi earn new business, beyond that already provided by UN-Habitat and UNEP!

Please be aware, however, that such a complicated process takes time to get right. We have successfully rolled the system out, but it has affected the implementation of our programme, as we informed you in advance that it would. As our staff learn to use the new system, as we deal
with the glitches and design issues, we ask that you bear with us as we improve our use of the system.

C. Missions and Engagement with Member States

From 23 to 25 June, I visited Monrovia, Liberia, at the invitation of the Government to attend and open the Liberia National Urban Forum. During my visit, I had the honour to meet with Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to discuss urbanization challenges in the country, especially in the context of the recent Ebola outbreak. I also met with senior Government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Augustine Ngafuan, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Morris M. Dukuly, and the Mayor of Monrovia, Hon. Clara Doe Mvogo, as well as other partners in Monrovia. I also had the opportunity to tour and see first-hand some of the areas in the city most severely affected by the Ebola epidemic.

On 29 and 30 June, I visited Bratislava where I met with senior officials of the Government of Slovakia, including the Minister of Environment, Hon. Peter Žiga, and the State Secretary of Environment, Mr. Ján Ilavský, and several others. During my visit, the Government of Slovakia announced a financial contribution of EUR15,000 to the Habitat III Trust Fund. I thank Slovakia for this important support and the role they have taken in the Governing Council of UN-Habitat, including through the CPR, and as a member of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee of Habitat III.

From Bratislava, I continued to Prague, Czech Republic, where I held official meetings, as Secretary-General of Habitat III, to discuss preparations for the regional meeting for Habitat III to be held in Prague in March next year. I am confident that this meeting, under the strong leadership of the Minister of Regional Development of the Czech Republic, Hon. Karla Šlechtová, in coordination with the Habitat III Secretariat, will be ambitious and provide an important consolidation of relevant urban development issues in the European region towards the conference.

During my visit to Addis Ababa to attend the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, I also took the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Urban Development, Housing and Construction of Ethiopia, Hon. Mekuria Haile. During our meeting, we discussed how to renew and deepen UN-Habitat’s partnership with the Government of Ethiopia to support their National Development Plan, including through new urban development programmes. Building on the long-lasting relationship with the Ethiopian Government, I look forward to expanding our collaboration in the future.

On 21 and 22 July, I was honoured to participate in two key meetings in the Vatican, organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to discuss modern-day slavery, climate change and sustainable urbanization. The meetings, which brought together an impressive number of Mayors from around the world, built on Pope Francis’ recent Encyclical on environmental protection and contributed to the debate on the moral dimensions of sustainable development. During my stay in the Vatican, I also had the opportunity to meet with the Vatican Secretary for Relations with States, Bishop Paul Gallagher, to discuss the support and contribution of the Holy See to the preparations for Habitat III.