CONVERGENCE PAPER

Working Group of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of UN-Habitat

Pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly Resolution 72/226, two meetings of the Working Group of the Committee of Permanent Representatives were convened to examine the governance of UN-Habitat, as well as its financial rules and regulations, in order to present findings and recommendations for the consideration of the General Assembly by the 30th of June. The meetings, held on 26 and 28 February, were conducted in an open and constructive spirit, for which I thank all participants.

From the discussions held during the two meetings, it was possible to identify more points of agreement than disagreement. There is a clear consensus, for instance, regarding the importance of strengthening UN-Habitat, which has acquired renewed urgency given the Programme’s role as focal point for the New Urban Agenda and the importance of addressing urban challenges in the implementation of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. There is also a common understanding that a careful balance between UN-Habitat’s normative and operational tasks must be achieved. Furthermore, from these first two rounds of discussions, it was evident that the issues of oversight and procedures must be seen together: effective governance will generate the trust required to endow the Programme with greater operational flexibility. The key procedures under consideration include: granting UN-Habitat composite status; full delegation of authority to the Executive Director; allowing field and project-focused policies and rules; integrated budgeting; and providing regular budget contributions through a grant modality - all of which should be accompanied by enhanced oversight and accountability. It also came through in discussions that, while a clear understanding of the possible implications of these options is required in order for the Working Group to formulate its recommendations, we need not, at this stage, spell out every detail of the preferred administrative procedures. If accepted by the General Assembly, that task will fall upon the future governance structure of UN-Habitat.

At this stage of discussions, a key issue to be addressed revolves around the scope and breadth of the governance structure to be recommended. One set of Member States has a clear preference for a universal membership option, so as to ensure authority and legitimacy to that structure. Another set has indicated that the Executive Board option would be more appropriate, particularly given the greater flexibility that is being advocated for the Programme. In order to fulfill its mandate, this Working Group will need to find common ground in considering these perspectives.

In light of this, the Working Group might consider a hybrid option, combining a universalized Governing Council, or universal Urban Assembly; and a strong and focused Executive Board.

The universal Governing Council would be responsible for providing general policy guidance for UN-Habitat, as well as for refining global norms and standards in human settlements and sustainable urbanization. It could also review the quadrennial report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
The Executive Board would be responsible for oversight of the work of UN-Habitat. It would approve the programme of work and budget and closely monitor performance. Its size and the periodicity of its meetings would follow those of other similar bodies in the UN System. Following other examples, the line of reporting for the Executive Board would include ECOSOC and the General Assembly.

In view of the possible new governance structure, the role of the Committee of Permanent Representatives would need to be revised. Consideration could therefore be given to concentrating its mandate in the preparation of the meetings of the new universal Governing Council meetings (in which case, the reduction of CPR meetings could also free up resources for the new governance structures). This would be without prejudice to provisions being made to enable CPR members to follow Executive Board proceedings as observers, in similar fashion to what occurs in other Executive Boards. Furthermore, Member States should strongly consider basing both the universal Governing Council and the Executive Board in Nairobi, thus enabling them to benefit from the direct support of the Secretariat and the knowledge of Nairobi-based delegations, which comes from day to day interaction with the Programme.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to enhancing the participation of stakeholders - in particular local authorities - in the work of UN-Habitat. Their interest and involvement in the Programme will not only contribute to its enhanced relevance, but could provide impetus for improved funding. In order to enhance the attractiveness and usefulness of UN-Habitat for local authorities and other stakeholders, provisions should be made for their active engagement in the universal Governing Council. Consideration could also be given to allowing them to sit as observers in the Executive Board. The Working Group might also want to consider ways to strengthen the linkages and synergies between the proposed universal Governing Council and the World Urban Forum. One way of doing this would be to introduce a ministerial segment in the World Urban Forum, which would continue to be held in alternate years to the universalized Governing Council.