Nineteenth session of the Governing Council*
Nairobi, 5-9 May 2003
Item 4 of the provisional agenda**

Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme,
UN-HABITAT: progress report of the Executive Director

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME:
PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Executive Director

Addendum

First session of the World Urban Forum

1. In its resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001, the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) to, inter alia, promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda1.

2. The unified World Urban Forum has as its focus international cooperation in shelter and urban development and serves as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT on these issues. To this end, the Forum (to be held biennially in the years in which the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT does not meet) facilitates the exchange of experience and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners. As an initiative in global civic engagement, the World Urban Forum places strong emphasis on the participation of Habitat Agenda partners and relevant international programmes, funds and agencies, thus ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, the sharing

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* In its resolution 56/206 of 21 December 2001, the General Assembly transformed the Commission on Human Settlements into the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. This session has been designated as the nineteenth instead of the first session of the Governing Council to signify the continuity and relationship between the Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements.

** HSP/GC/19/1.
of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies. A further function of the World Urban Forum is the elimination of overlap and the identification of synergies among development agencies in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Reports and recommendations from the World Urban Forum will be submitted by the Executive Director to the Governing Council for consideration and appropriate action.

3. Participation in the World Urban Forum is open to representatives from national Governments and Habitat Agenda partners. The latter include local authorities, the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, human settlements professionals, research institutions and academies of science, the private, business and non-profit sectors, foundations, relevant United Nations organizations and other international agencies.

4. In pursuance of the aforementioned request of the Commission on Human Settlements, the first session of the unified World Urban Forum was held at the headquarters of UN-HABITAT in Nairobi from 29 April to 3 May 2002. The main themes of the Forum were sustainable urban development and cities without slums. The session was organized by UN-HABITAT in collaboration with various Habitat Agenda partners. Some 1,200 participants from over 80 countries attended the meeting, including 400 senior officials and government experts, 100 representatives of local authorities, 350 representatives of non-governmental organizations and more than 200 slum dwellers, as well as United Nations agencies. Organized in dialogue sessions, the Forum was considered by all partners as having been very successful in its role as a global think tank on urbanization strategies. Two series of dialogues, involving close to 100 panellists, were held in parallel.

5. The thematic dialogues addressed the issues of urban governance and the right to the city; the millennium development goal on cities without slums; decentralization; city-to-city cooperation; the international role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; security of residential tenure and the way to stop forced evictions; and monitoring urban conditions and trends.

6. The dialogues on sustainable urbanization, designed as a pre-conference input to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, addressed the role of cities in national and international development; the sustainability of cities; the rural dimension of sustainable urban development; the management of the HIV/AIDS pandemic at the local level; and water and sanitation for the urban poor.

7. The first session of the World Urban Forum drew up a number of partnership implementation proposals which were submitted to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in addition to recommendations for consideration by the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT at its nineteenth session. The first session also clarified the objectives of the Forum and the working arrangements for its future sessions. The report of the session was circulated by UN-HABITAT in May 2002. An evaluation of the session was conducted through a questionnaire sent out to participants which provided useful feedback and advice for the next session.

8. Among the recommendations of the World Urban Forum, the following may be of particular relevance to the deliberations of the Governing Council:

(a) Policy makers should accept the reality of urban growth and concentrate more resources on the effective management of the urbanization process;

(b) The principal obstacle to sustainable urbanization lies in the lack of planning, implementation and management capacities of local governments and their partners;

(c) The urban poor are able to generate resources and take initiatives to improve their living environment but need more support from Governments and local authorities;
(d) The market alone cannot be relied upon to deliver basic services for the poor; new partnerships between local authorities, the private sector and community-based organizations have to be designed, tested and promoted;

(e) The millennium development goal of significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 can be achieved provided adequate slum upgrading policies are adopted and implemented;

(f) The millennium development goal means that slums should be upgraded in situ and integrated into the city, with the exception of those built in environmentally dangerous locations;

(g) A major goal of the Global Campaign for Secure Tenure should be to stop forced evictions; there is a need to establish an international advisory group to monitor unlawful evictions and to propose practical alternatives to evictions;

(h) City-to-city cooperation should be promoted by Governments and international organizations as it can bring substantial benefits in mutual learning and in building the capacities needed to make the urbanization process sustainable;

(i) Despite political, legal and institutional differences, countries around the world could benefit from frameworks and guidelines established to support the process towards effective decentralization;

(j) An important role for non-governmental organizations is to facilitate the link between communities and local authorities; UN-HABITAT should undertake a critical analysis of its relationship with non-governmental organizations;

(k) Most cities need international cooperation to realize their crucial contribution to sustainable development, this cooperation should be increased, better organized and coordinated;

(l) Sustainable urbanization should not be seen as a predominantly ecological issue but as a set of challenges including poverty reduction, social inclusion, gender equality, economic efficiency and good governance;

(m) Local authorities have an important role to play in fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic; adequate shelter and secure tenure are essential for care and treatment of affected persons;

(n) Water and sanitation are the foundation for sustainable urbanization and require an increased mobilization of local and international resources as well as effective community involvement;

(o) UN-HABITAT should consider issuing a single flagship report instead of two and should continue its work on urban indicators – particularly for monitoring the millennium development goal on cities without slums – at the global and local levels.

9. The Governing Council is invited to include these recommendations in the mainstream of the UN-HABITAT work programme and to support their implementation at global, national and local levels.

1 A/CONF.165/14, chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.