Progress Report on preparations for the Third session of the World Urban Forum

“Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas into Action”

BACKGROUND:

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 Agenda. Serving as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, the World Urban Forum is held biennially in the years in which the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT does not meet. It facilitates the exchange of experience and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners (HSP/GC/18/Annex IV).

The success of the World Urban Forum can be attributed to the fact that it provides a unique opportunity for dialogue between government leaders, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, grass-root movements, urban professionals, youth and the private sector. As such, it occupies a much coveted niche between the World Social Forum, which does not involve governments, and World Economic Forum, where participation is by invitation only. Through a variety of large and small-scale events, participants have an unparalleled opportunity to discuss and debate with leading thinkers from around the world on the future of our urbanizing world.

Following a series of discussions between UN-HABITAT and the Government of Canada, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), it is strongly felt that issues of urban sustainability are most timely considering the legacy owed to the 1976 Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements. At its second meeting of 22 June 2005, the CPR Working Group 3 members provided comments to the Secretariat on further refining the dialogues at the World Urban Forum, of which there will be two under each sub-theme. These concerns are addressed below.

WUF III should reach out to those who are working towards the future we seek today, and give them prominence in the discussions. Key to these discussions should be an underlying effort to “Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas into Action”, on which there is general agreement among all parties.
As already indicated, there will be three sub-themes linked to the issue of **Sustainable Cities**, and six Dialogues. Governments and Habitat Agenda Partners have been invited to comment on the initial draft Sub-themes and Dialogues presented at the seventeenth regular meeting of the CPR. Several comments and valuable contributions have since been recorded. Following a meeting by the Canadian Inter-Ministerial Group Thursday, Sept. 22, 2005, on the Sub-themes and Dialogues, the consultative process on these issues is now coming to an end. There will be a conclusive meeting with the CPR Working Group on WUF III October 11, attended by the Commissioner General of WUF Canada.

**WUF III structure – Provoking exchange and focusing the debate:**

In order to stimulate participants to move from ideas to action, it will be important to shape the programme to maximize the exchange of proven ideas and example of best practices. Delegates should leave WUF III with more concrete ideas and more tools then they came with. The programme will be designed to facilitate the greatest possible participation of delegates in interactive discussions and debates, focussing on lessons learned from real world experiences. There are methods that encourage such exchanges with a diverse audience. Among these methods are presentations that explore case-studies in a dynamic and interactive manner. Learning from recommendations made from the evaluations undertaken from previous events, it is suggested that the World Urban Forum be structured with the following components:

**Opening/Closing Sessions:** (Monday AM & Friday PM)

*To be concise and scene-setting, in plenary.*

**Round Tables:** (Sunday PM /optional/, and Monday PM)

*Parallel Round Tables for i.a. Ministers, Mayors, Private Sector representatives, NGOs, Women, and Youth will be held to review progress made, focussing on MDG Goal 7, and challenges ahead. Chairs’ reports are the expected outcome.*

**Key-Note Addresses:** (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday AM)

*A daily 1 hour high-level Key-Note Address featuring one or two world renowned speakers addressing the Theme, and the Sub-Themes of the day.*

**Dialogues:** (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday AM)

*Dialogues will follow the Key Note address and utilize interactive moderators and be focussed on engaging the audience in debate. Two Dialogues will take place in parallel, focussing each on different aspects of the Sub-Theme of the day.*

**Networking Events:** (Tuesday – Friday PM)

*A wide range of events organized primarily by Habitat Agenda Partners. These events will take place in the afternoon with a break to encourage exchanges. A wide range of learning opportunities will be provided by leading organizations.*

**Exposition with Speakers’ Corner** (Monday – Friday)

*There will be ample space for expositions, close to the main meeting rooms. In the Exposition Hall, there will be a Speakers’ Corner, Internet cafés and refreshments*
available. After the Dialogues, there will be “Lunch Lectures”, and between the Networking Events, there will be a break for further lectures.

Special Events: (Sunday – Friday PM)
(A series of receptions, launches, signing ceremonies, field visits and cultural events, to take place after the Networking Events).

BACKGROUND PAPER
Once concurrence on the dialogue themes is reached, one integrated and comprehensive background paper will be prepared by an outside consulting institution, with which initial contacts have already been made. The background paper will provide the conceptual framework and normative justification for the centrality of the theme and sub-themes for sustainable development in the 21st Century, including achieving of the Millennium Development Goals. The expected completion date is March 2006.

PARTNERS
On 11 July 2005, letters were sent to Habitat Agenda partners registered in UN-HABITAT’s data base and to the organizers of Networking Events at WUF II to consult them with regard to the scope and content of networking events, as well as on the format on WUF III, its theme, draft sub-themes and dialogues. It was mentioned in these letters that formal letters of invitation will be sent to the partners in due course.

FINANCE AND BUDGET
The tentative budget for the third session of the World Urban Forum is attached. As the World Urban Forum is not a policy making body, support from Governments is required to cover conference costs, and travel of participants especially from developing and least developed countries. A first requests for support were sent out on 11th July 2005.

The Government of Canada has made a generous contribution of US$ 605,956 to support preparatory activities, received in August 2005 and have pledged additional support. A number of preparatory missions have been undertaken to coordinate activities with the Canadian team. The Host Country Agreement with the Government of Canada is currently under negotiation and will be finalized soon.

COLLABORATION WITH CANADIAN COUNTERPARTS
The Canadian Government has established a National Advisory Committee of prominent individuals who collectively have significant expertise on urban issues from a number of perspectives. Co-chaired by a former mayor of Vancouver and the former president of Canada's development assistance agency, the NAC is providing valuable input into the Canadian Government's planning for WUF III, including how to profile the Canadian experience in urban development.

Further, Canada has established a counterpart secretariat (WUF Canada) based both in Ottawa and Vancouver and is headed by Mr. Charles Kelly, Commissioner General, who is appointed by the Government of Canada to lead this effort. There is also a team
working in Vancouver and Ottawa to organize an online internet pre conference (“the Habitat Jam”) on December 1-3 2005 as a means of both engaging partners and furthering debate on WUF III related issues in the run up to the June 2006 meeting in Vancouver.

The UN-HABITAT WUF secretariat and its Canadian counterparts are in contact with the first priorities being the completion of the Host Country Agreement and establishing a time line for the preparation of all aspects of WUF III.

PROGRESS ON INFORMATION
A WUF III brochure has been printed in Canada and was disseminated already to the MDG Summit, members of the CPR, and has been included in the World Habitat Day information kit. The UN-HABITAT partners’ mailing list (about 18,000 addresses) is being sent to WUF Canada for further dissemination of the brochures.

WUF III brochure has been sent to Information Service Section/Media list servers and the UN-HABITAT internet site has been updated accordingly. A draft text to be part of the Information Kit for exhibitors has been sent to WUF Canada for comments. The kit will include all necessary information for exhibitors such as standard booths, availability and costs of services, clearance and customs procedures, etc. Online registration for WUF III is due to start by end of October 2005.

CHALLENGES AND MILESTONES AHEAD
(October – December 2005)
- Finalisation of Sub-themes and Dialogues
- Formalization of Host Country Agreement with Canadian counterparts, pending early security assessment by UN Security Services of the conference site, as well as resolution of a number of matters to be part of Host Country Agreement.
- Finalizing contract for background paper.
- Raising sufficient additional resources to ensure geographically balanced representation and participation in networking events.
- Notification and Invitation to Governments and Partners.