Follow-up to the Decisions of the Twentieth Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Statement of the Executive Director

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Permanent Representatives.

The 20th session of the Governing Council was a particularly productive one, passing a record number of resolutions, reflecting intensive negotiations, which in turn demonstrated the strong commitment on the part of Delegations to further strengthen the work of UN-HABITAT and to provide guidance for the challenging years ahead for this Programme. The report of the 20th session is now before you, from where it will pass through the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly for its review at the 60th session this Fall.

In its decisions, the Governing Council focused on key areas of the work of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, such as activities with Habitat Agenda partners and their mainstreaming in the work of the Secretariat. Core strategic mechanisms and tools for delivery of the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration were, also emphasized such as the Campaigns on Urban Governance and Secure Tenure, the documentation of best practices, the Slum Upgrading Facility and decentralization, as well as related substantive areas such as housing for vulnerable groups and access to basic services. Special emphasis was also given to particular sub-sets of cities and
countries with particular climatic and geographic characteristics, as well as to least
developed countries in general. The operational activities of UN-HABITAT were also
addressed, particularly in relation to post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction and the
strengthening of the UN-HABITAT’s presence and normative and operational outreach
in the developing countries, particularly through the Habitat Programme Managers. In
addition, the Governing Council also addressed the issue of Regional Ministerial
consultative mechanisms, relations with other bodies of the United Nations system as
well as the preparations for the Third World Urban Forum. Finally, the Governing
Council also approved the Work Programme and Budget of the United Nations Human

While these decisions of the Governing Council provide valuable further guidance
to the Secretariat for its implementation of the 2006-2007 work programme, I should also
like to point out Mr. Chairman, that in a number of cases these decisions establish
additional priorities, enhance and expand the work under the approved outputs or in
effect re-designate the priority level given to outputs in the approved work-programme.
This in turn has financial implications in some cases as well effecting the allocation of
the limited staff resources of the Secretariat. In this regard, for the information of the
Permanent Representatives, I am circulating with my statement a Chart that illustrates
this, and with the aim to seek the guidance of the Committee of Permanent
Representatives on this matter so as to assure the effective implementation of the
decisions of the Governing Council within the context of the approved work programme
for 2006-2007. This Chart represents an initial interpretation of the decisions of the
Governing Council, and the Secretariat stands ready to provide further detail to the Permanent Representatives on this matter.

It is also evident from the decisions of the 20th session of the Governing Council, that the Members States were very much concerned with the strategic focus of the overall work of the Secretariat over the medium term, as well as ensuring that specific substantive activities and other aspects of the work of the Secretariat are guided by new specific strategic plans and periodically evaluated. In addition, special attention is given in the decisions to enhancement of the efficiency of the work of the Secretariat, particularly with regard to the current administrative arrangements at UN-HABITAT, including its relationship with UNON, and by the Governing Council’s endorsement of recommendations for improving the preparations for future sessions of the Governing Council in its resolution 20/21, which also calls on the Committee of Permanent Representatives to elaborate further proposals for improving the structure and organizational arrangements of the next and future sessions of the Governing Council. The Secretariat stands ready and looks forward to work with the Committee of Permanent Representatives in the implementation of all these decisions as part of the consultation process called for by these decisions so as to further strengthen UN-HABITAT and its activities.

Here I should like to take this opportunity to refer in particular to the decisions of the Governing Council in its resolution 20/19 on the 2006-2007 Work Programme and Budget, which called upon the Executive Director, in consultation with the Committee of permanent Representatives, to develop a six-year medium-term strategic and institutional
plan, including clear implications for the organizational structure, financial and human resources of UN-HABITAT, including at the global, regional and country levels, taking into account wider UN reform processes, for submission to the Governing Council at its 21st session.

In this regard, given the importance of this undertaking to the future work of the Secretariat, I should like to suggest that the starting point for this undertaking be the updated strategic vision of UN-HABITAT, which was submitted to the Governing Council at its 19th session in 2003, and which subsequently has provided the strategic framework for the work of the Secretariat. With its focus on the eradication or urban poverty as the guiding principle, it has provided continuity in the work of the Secretariat since the beginning of its revitalization in 1998. I have appended the updated strategic vision as presented to the Governing Council at its 19th session to my statement for the information of the Distinguished Permanent Representatives to assist in the preparation of the medium term strategic plan and, as an initial step, I should like to invite comments on it by the members of the Committee to give guidance to the Secretariat in its preparations of the strategic and institutional plan in further consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

The urgency of such a plan is, as the Distinguished Representatives are aware, dictated by the ongoing United Nations reform processes and with the Secretary-General’s submission to the Millennium Review Summit this Fall of wide-ranging reform proposals for the work of the United Nations, which includes, inter-alia,
proposals to review and merge mandates of existing organizations. Although I have since been apprised that the mandates of agencies, programmes and bodies of the United Nations which have not been reviewed in the past five years would not be subject of such an exercise, and this would exclude UN-HABITAT by virtue of its upgrading in December 2001, the Millennium Review Summit may decide otherwise. In light of this possibility, the work on this matter becomes paramount in order to ensure that human settlements remains a core concern of the work of United Nations. I should therefore like to propose that an expert team be established to assist in the preparation of this strategic and institutional plan, and I should like to invite the members of this Committee to propose experts to form this team, and provide the commensurate financial support, to assist the Secretariat, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, in the drafting of the Plan.

One key aspect of this strengthening of UN-HABITAT, and its effectiveness and credibility in the implementation of its work programme, particularly at the country level will certainly be the continued presence of the Habitat Programme Managers, which was also a focus of the deliberations of the Governing Council at its 19th session, resulting in resolution 20/15, which inter-alia, called for an independent strategic evaluation of the performance and impact of the performance of the Habitat Programme Managers before the end of 2006. For the information of the Committee, I have appended to my statement the list of Habitat Programme Managers currently on board and working, as well as the MOU with UNDP regarding their duties, responsibilities and reporting lines. I should like to suggest, however, that any evaluation, in order to have sufficient credibility, only
cover those HPMs that have been performing their duties for at least two years, and I look forward to your further guidance in this matter as we proceed with the implementation of this decision.

Here I should also, however, like to express the view that the presence of the HPMs is essential to the cost-effective global outreach of the work of the Secretariat and the effectiveness of its work in both the normative and operational areas. It gives further organizational depth to the work of UN-HABITAT and serves to consolidate its institutional visibility at a time of ongoing system-wide reform processes. Here it is also useful to point out that because of the nature of its mandate, operational activities will always need to be part of the work of UN-HABITAT in order to give credibility to its normative and policy advice. Without these activities – whether in the areas of slum improvements, basic services or municipal and national level-capacity building, among others, it would be akin to requesting one to repair a car who has never held a wrench in his or her hand.

Further, Mr. Chairman, given the urgency of consolidating the Programme and increasing its effectiveness, so prominently expressed by the Governing Council, I am attaching particular priority to the appointment of a Deputy Executive Director at UN-HABITAT, in line also with the recommendation of the evaluation of UN-HABITAT undertaken by the OIOS, which will be before the Committee on Programme Coordination for its review this June. Here I should like to note, as already pointed out in the Question and Answers document which I submitted to the Governing Council, that
this matter is closely under consideration by the Secretary-General, and I further discussed the matter with him while in New York last month and he has instructed the Executive Director to identify suitable candidates for his consideration. The duties and responsibilities of the Deputy are given in the Secretary-General’s Bulletin of 22 November 2002 establishing UN-HABITAT as a Programme and define the profile of the candidate. As the key administrator of the Foundation, the candidate must have, among other qualities, a strong background in finance and proven fund-raising abilities, as well as the confidence of donors particularly in light of the current upgrading of the Foundation. With all these criteria in mind, I should like to call upon the Member States of this Committee to assist the Executive Director in identifying suitable candidates to propose to the Secretary-General as a matter of urgency.

Finally, Mr.Chairman, I should like to refer to the issue of the dates for the 21st session of the Governing Council, which was a matter of discussions at the past 20th session and is reflected in its Report. It will be recalled that in its resolution 59/265 on “Patterns of Conferences”, the General Assembly, in operative paragraph 5 of that resolution, decided that there should be an intervening period of at least two weeks after the closing of the sessions of relevant inter-governmental bodies and the beginning of the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Given the particular relevance of the work of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT and the Commission on Sustainable Development to each other, which had already been acknowledged by the Commission as early as at its first substantive session in 1994, which had focused on human settlements with the view towards the upcoming Habitat II Conference, the
Secretariat looks forward to a decision of the CPR which is in that spirit in order to allow it to effectively participate in the 15th session of the CSD and to forward the decisions of the 21st session of the Governing Council relevant to the Commission on Sustainable Development with optional impact and effort.

I should like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, that in light of the very full programme of work that the follow-up to the decisions of the 20th session of the Governing Council require, that the Secretariat is ready, and will be fully prepared, to support the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and its Working Groups on Policy and Programme and Finance and Administration, respectively, as well as that of any additional working groups, in particular for the preparations of the third World Urban Forum, which it may deem prudent to establish.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.