Draft minutes of the thirty-third regular meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, held on 11 June 2009

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting was opened at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 11 June 2009, by Ms. Jacqueline Mendoza, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

2. The meeting was attended by 70 representatives from 42 countries and 1 observer mission.

3. The Chair welcomed the following new permanent representatives to the Committee and looked forward to their engagement and contribution to the work of the Committee: Mr. J. P. B. Dissanyake (Sri Lanka); Mr. Deng Hongbo (China); and bade farewell to the following permanent representatives who had departed the Nairobi duty station, thanking them for their contribution to the work of the Committee, which had greatly assisted the Committee in discharging its mandate: Mr. Zhang Ming (China); Mr. Ifikhar A. Arain (Pakistan).

4. The Committee observed a minute’s silence as a mark of respect for the victims and the bereaved following the disappearance of Air France flight No. 447 from Brazil to France on 1 June 2009.

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

5. The Committee adopted the agenda as set forth in document HSP/CPR/33/1/Rev.1.

Item 2: Adoption of the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, held on 24 March 2009

6. The Committee approved and adopted the draft minutes of its extraordinary meeting held on 24 March 2009 as set out in document HSP/CPR/33/2.

Item 3: Follow up on the decisions of the twenty-second session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat

7. Introducing the item, Ms. Anna Tibaijuka the Executive Director, expressed her gratitude to the members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and representatives of member States from
capitals who had contributed to the success of the twenty-second session of the Governing Council and, in particular, to Ms. Mendoza and members of the Bureau for their efforts in preparing four draft resolutions presented in pre-session documents. In addition, she thanked the President and members of the Bureau for the proficient conduct of the Governing Council’s work. She drew attention to resolutions that required follow-up by the Committee, namely, resolution 22/5 on governance of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme; resolution 22/7 on the work programme and budget of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme for the biennium 2010–2011; and resolution 22/10 on the World Urban Forum; and to the note by the secretariat on the proposed implementation of those decisions set out in document HSP/CPR/33/3. She stressed that the Committee would be kept informed of progress made in the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Governing Council at its twenty-second session through the secretariat’s six-monthly reports to the Committee on the medium-terms strategic and institutional plan.

8. The Chair indicated that three working groups would be established on the medium-term strategic and institutional plan, the work programme and budget of UN-Habitat and the World Urban Forum. Those groups, she said, would be regionally-representative with terms of reference established by the Committee.

9. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives congratulated the secretariat for its efficient organization of the twenty-second session of the Council and the successful outcomes thereof.

10. Many representatives pointed to the urgent need to start working on the follow-up to resolution 22/5 on governance of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme as soon as possible. One representative asked the secretariat to mobilize all efforts possible for an early meeting of the working group on that issue. Another representative called for the first meeting of the working group to be held within two weeks of the present meeting.

11. Several representatives emphasized the importance of timely circulation of documentation for working group meetings; a number of representatives suggested that relevant documents should be circulated at least five working days prior to a meeting, failing which, said one, the meeting should be cancelled. A number of representatives congratulated the secretariat on its forward planning for follow-up activities. One representative cautioned, however, that the proposed schedule of meetings should not be seen as restrictive; additional meetings might be required.

12. The representative of Brazil expressed her concern over the relationship introduced in resolution 22/10 between the fifth session of the World Urban Forum and the lessons-learned review of previous sessions of the World Urban Forum. She said that, owing to time considerations, the review’s outcomes could not be fully applied to the fifth session of the Forum, although her Government, as host of the session, would take on board its conclusions and recommendations.

13. Noting that paragraph 1 of resolution 22/5 referred to the work programme for 2010–2011, the Executive Director said that the secretariat, having circulated a concept note on the matter, was ahead of schedule in its work on governance. She noted that the officer in charge of the governance review, Mr. Paul Taylor, was ready to meet with the Committee’s working group on the issue. He would, however, be leaving the following day for his annual home leave, during which time the Deputy Executive Director would be available, including for the proposed meeting on 22 June 2009.

14. She acknowledged that tardiness in the preparation by the secretariat of documents had been problematic and she affirmed her commitment to endeavour to adhere to the agreed five-day deadline. She informed representatives that the secretariat was in the process of appointing a documentation officer to the Governing Council secretariat to assure the timely preparation of documents.

15. Regarding resolution 22/10 on the World Urban Forum, she said that Mr. Daniel Biau would circulate a concept note on the follow-up to that resolution. She concurred with comments made by the representative of Brazil that actions called for in the resolution could not be fully applied to the fifth session of the Forum.

16. The Chair noted that a first meeting of the contact group on governance was planned for 22 June 2009 and she reiterated the importance of circulating the concept paper on that issue in a timely manner to ensure its full consideration by members prior to the meeting. She said that she would meet with regional groups in the coming days to agree on the format and methodology for the meetings of the working groups.
17. One representative requested that progress in the implementation of all the resolutions of the Council at its twenty-second session be reported to the Committee in the context of the secretariat’s six-monthly progress reports. She drew attention, in particular, to resolution 22/3 on cities and climate change and requested regular updates on the work of UN-Habitat to tackle climate change.

18. One representative, responding to comments made by the Executive Director, suggested that the view of the membership of the Committee was that paragraph 1 of resolution 22/5 referred to the work programme for the current biennium rather than the work programme for 2010–2011. He thanked the secretariat for the circulation of the concept note and suggested that it constituted a good start to the work ahead. He noted that it was unfortunate that Mr. Taylor would be away when the discussions on governance commenced.

19. The Executive Director stressed that the secretariat would report quarterly to the Committee on resolutions adopted by the Council at its twenty-second session. She noted that the secretariat was ready to work in the spirit of resolution 22/5 although from a legal perspective the latter referred to the work programme and budget for 2010–2011.

20. Several representatives expressed the opinion that resolution 22/5 referred to the work programme for the current biennium and said that work on governance should be accommodated within the 2008–2009 biennium.

21. The Executive Director clarified that there had been a resolution on governance adopted by the Council at its twenty-first session and that UN-Habitat had submitted a report as requested therein. She suggested that defining the period of the work programme referred to in resolution 22/5 was unnecessary in view of the fact that the secretariat was seized of the matter and continuing its work in that regard.

**Item 5: Progress in the implementation of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan, including experimental reimbursable seeding operations**

22. Introducing the item, the Executive Director drew attention to the six-monthly progress report on the implementation of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan 2008–2013 as set out in document HSP/CPR/33/4, which, she said, represented a significant milestone as it reviewed implementation in all six focus areas of the plan for the first six months of the roll-out phase. She provided an overview of the structure of the report and stressed that the content of the report was based on the results-based framework, the completion of which was a major achievement by the secretariat during the period under review. Notwithstanding such achievements, she acknowledged that further improvements were required, in particular with regard to excellence in management. She outlined strategic priorities for the remainder of 2009: development of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan road map 2009–2013; review of the current institutional governance and management arrangements and development of performance measurement systems. In closing, she invited comments from the Committee and thanked members for their expressions of support for the plan.

23. In the ensuing discussion, all the representatives who spoke thanked the Executive Director and the secretariat for the report, in particular for its format and level of detail. One representative welcomed the thoroughness of the report and the inclusion of comments made by representatives on the draft. He commended the report as a major tool for assessing the performance of UN-Habitat; it indicated where good progress had been made on the medium-term strategic and institutional plan but there was also clarity on areas where work still needed to be done. He said that it was incumbent upon the representatives to read the report seriously. He proposed that the following six-monthly report should be circulated not as a draft but as the final version and should be discussed in detail by the working group, even if that made the process lengthier. Some representatives recommended that progress in the implementation of the experimental reimbursable seeding operations should be shown in a separate report.

24. A number of representatives expressed their appreciation for the working group meeting that had been held on the draft six-monthly progress report, which was described by one representative as a big step in the right direction; he urged the secretariat to continue that process as it allowed for better dialogue with and feedback from member States. He called for more discussion of content rather than format, for improved data in the following report covering more of the indicators and for greater emphasis on excellence in management and institutional alignment within the organization. He sought clarification of work undertaken on institutional alignment and asked whether UN-Habitat had taken
steps to improve the corporate culture and alignment with the medium-term strategic and institutional plan.

25. Several representatives welcomed the progress made in implementing the medium-term strategic and institutional plan and, in particular, experimental reimbursable seeding operations. A number of representatives expressed interest in a separate report on experimental reimbursable seeding operations and one representative recommended separate reports on specific projects. The representative of Uganda thanked UN-Habitat for the introduction of experimental reimbursable seeding operations in her country.

26. One representative, while recognizing the improvements made in the quality of the report, cautioned against the proliferation of reports and strategies and proposed that there should be one good progress report at the end of the year to clearly indicate progress made to date. He welcomed the new listening mode of UN-Habitat that had become more apparent. Other representatives emphasized the importance of practical results and welcomed the achievements outlined in the report, particularly in the area of quick-wins; the strategies put in place to strengthen weak areas were appreciated; measurable indicators were called for.

27. One representative thanked the secretariat for the organization of the recent international tripartite conference on urbanization challenges and poverty reduction in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in Nairobi and said that it had provided an opportunity to focus on UN-Habitat activities in the implementation of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan. She asked the secretariat to report to the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the outcomes of the conference.

28. The Executive Director thanked representatives for their encouraging comments and appreciation of the progress made; the secretariat would strive, she said, to further improve both report content and format and appreciated input from the representatives. She stressed that specific indicators in the area of management excellence would be available in the following report and that the experimental reimbursable seeding operations were largely on course, but more funding was needed.

29. Mr. Biau gave a brief report on the international tripartite conference on urbanization challenges and poverty reduction in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, which, he said, had been well attended by some 40 ministers and more than 200 participants. The outcomes of the conference would be made available to all member States.

30. The representative of Argentina expressed the view that there had been lack of activity on the part of UN-Habitat in Latin America regarding identification of projects for experimental reimbursable seeding operations. In addition, a preliminary project signed in Argentina that was referred to in the medium-term strategic and institutional plan had been carried out by a non-governmental organization without the full knowledge of the Government of Argentina. He stated that Argentina had not been informed of preparations for the international tripartite conference on urbanization challenges and poverty reduction and had not received a formal invitation to the meeting.

31. The representative of Spain confirmed that his Government would be interested in hosting the next meeting of the experimental reimbursable seeding operations steering and monitoring committee, but required a formal request from the secretariat to do so. He endorsed the view of the representative of Argentina that such formalities should be adhered to.

32. In her response, the Executive Director explained the circumstances in which proposed projects in Chile and Peru had not come to fruition and assured the Committee that the geographical balance in project selection was taken seriously by the secretariat. A representative of the secretariat clarified that a UN-Habitat mission was currently in Central America and Argentina and would be meeting officials in an effort to maintain the important goal of regional balance. He said that similar consideration was being given to Eastern Europe and countries with economies in transition. The Executive Director apologized for any oversight that may have occurred in the distribution of information regarding the international tripartite conference on urbanization challenges and poverty reduction in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Item 5: Country-level activities

33. Introducing the item, the Executive Director outlined the main objectives of UN-Habitat country-level activities as set out in document HSP/CPR/33/5, focusing on promoting policy reforms consistent with internationally agreed development goals and global United Nations agendas; building
institutional and human capacities at all levels and testing and validating strategies, policy options and practical tools through demonstration projects; and supporting the implementation of local and national plans of action, including the mobilization of corresponding national resources. She said that all UN-Habitat country-level activities were described in the 2009 biennial operational activities report distributed to member States at the twenty-second session of the Governing Council. Those activities had required the establishment of a country presence for the first time in selected developing countries, which had been achieved through the signing of a memorandum of understanding with UNDP in 2002. The activities were demand-driven and extra-budgetary and thus developed in response to government requests once funds were available, and all operations were carried out within the framework of the “Delivering as One” initiative at country level.

34. In the ensuing discussion, all the representatives who took the floor expressed their appreciation for the report. One representative welcomed the inclusion of the present item on the agenda and the greater attention to substantive issues at country level; the report indicated the beginning of systematization of work at country level and an attempt to provide more information on what was being done. He expressed the hope that information would be provided to the Committee on lessons learned, experience in promoting policy reforms in different regions and human resource capacity-building. A number of representatives highlighted the importance of regional balance in country-level activities. One representative welcomed the cooperation between UN-Habitat and the European Commission and development banks in the area of water and sanitation in East Africa.

35. The representative of Pakistan expressed his appreciation for the assistance provided by the international community and United Nations agencies to the displaced population in his country following security operations in the North-West Frontier Province and, in particular, for the country-level projects being implemented by UN-Habitat in Pakistan.

36. The representative of the Russian Federation noted the growing interest in cooperation with UN-Habitat, particularly within the scope of experimental reimbursable seeding operations, among Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan, as demonstrated at a meeting on affordable housing organized by UN-Habitat in conjunction with the Agency for Construction and Architecture of the Government of Tajikistan held in May 2009. He expressed the hope that UN-Habitat would devote more attention to countries in the region in the future. He said that, as member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States were not well represented in Nairobi, his Government would be willing to coordinate in that regard.

37. Responding to comments made, the representative of the secretariat said that the examples given by the representatives of Pakistan and the Russian Federation illustrated well the two aspects of UN-Habitat work – the normative and operational. He cautioned that the main constraint for country-level activities was the mobilization of resources, particularly as every project had a different source of funding. It was easier, he said, to finance emergency operational projects than normative work such as organizing seminars. Normative activities on decentralization in Latin America, for example, were proving difficult to finance.

Item 6: Preparations for the fifth session of the World Urban Forum

38. Introducing the item, the Executive Director said that preparations for the fifth session of the World Urban Forum had begun immediately after it had been announced in Nanjing, China, that the Government of Brazil was to host the session and much ground had already been covered. A UN-Habitat mission had visited Rio de Janeiro in May 2009. She invited Ms. Mariam Yunusa, Coordinator of the World Urban Forum, to give a presentation on the work of the mission.

39. Ms. Yunusa gave an overview of the objectives of the mission to Rio de Janeiro, providing details of the budget and structure of the Forum, the theme of which was to be “The right to the city: bridging the urban divide”. She said that interest in the Forum was being shown at the highest political levels in Brazil, with support from all three levels of government, including at the federal level. The President’s commitment had been demonstrated by his receiving the mission team personally. The country’s readiness was also demonstrated by the hands-on approach of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the team of Brazilian professionals that was mobilized. Further details would be provided on the UN-Habitat website in the coming week.

40. A number of representatives took the floor to express their appreciation for the presentation and to congratulate the Executive Director and the Government of Brazil on the impressive progress made in the light of the difficult financial environment. One representative said that it was helpful and
constructive to link the themes of the Forum dialogues with specific aspects of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan.

Item 7: Quarterly report on the financial status of UN-Habitat

41. The Executive Director gave a brief summary of the financial situation of UN-Habitat as set out in document HSP/CPR/33/7. She said that the annual general purpose income was currently projected at $22 million; while the cash position remained positive, there was concern that only three Governments had made firm commitments on their 2009 contributions. The Executive Director called on member States to assist in increasing the predictability of UN-Habitat financial resources by providing multi-year financing frameworks. She expressed her appreciation to the Governments of Algeria and Slovenia for having paid their contributions and to the Governments and organizations that had provided support to the continuing post-conflict, post-disaster and poverty alleviation efforts of UN-Habitat in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan and the Sudan.

42. In response to the Executive Director’s report, one representative pledged that the late payment from his Government would be forthcoming shortly.

Item 8: Any other matters

43. The Executive Director announced that preparations were under way for World Habitat Day, to be co-hosted by the Government of the United States of America. She called on representatives to ensure that the occasion was marked in every country.

44. The representative of the Czech Republic took the floor to extend her best wishes to the Government of Sweden on assuming the presidency of the European Union. She expressed her gratitude to colleagues among member States and UN-Habitat staff members for their strong support to her country during its presidency, particularly during the twenty-second session of the Governing Council.

45. The Executive Director and a number of representatives congratulated the representative of the Czech Republic on her country’s leadership during its presidency of the European Union and the Government of Sweden on assuming the presidency.

46. The Committee observed a minute’s silence in memory of the late President of Gabon, Mr. Omar Bongo, who had died on 8 June 2009.

Item 9: Closure of the meeting

47. The Chair declared the meeting closed at 1.10 p.m. on Thursday, 11 June 2009.