Draft minutes of the thirty-fourth regular meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, held on 24 September 2009

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting was opened at 9.50 a.m. on Thursday, 24 September 2009, by Mr. Kelebert Nkomani, Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and Vice-Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

2. The meeting was attended by 71 representatives from 50 countries and one observer mission.

3. The Chair welcomed the following new permanent representatives to the Committee and looked forward to their engagement and contribution to its work: Ms. Margrit Hellwig-Böttke (Germany) and Mr. Seyed Ali Sharifi Sadati (Islamic Republic of Iran); and bade farewell to Mr. Roland Hauser (Austria) and Mr. Matayo Kyaligonza (Uganda), who had departed from the Nairobi duty station, thanking them for their contribution to the Committee’s work, which had greatly assisted it in discharging its mandate.

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

4. The Committee adopted the provisional agenda, as set forth in documents HSP/CPR/34/1 and Add.1.

Item 2: Adoption of the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 11 June 2009

5. The Committee approved and adopted the draft minutes of its thirty-third regular meeting held on 11 June 2009 as contained in document HSP/CPR/34/2.

Item 3: Quarterly report on UN-Habitat country activities

6. Introducing the item, Ms. Inge Björk-Klevby, Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat, described the format and contents of the quarterly report on UN-Habitat country activities set forth in document HSP/CPR/34/3. She drew attention to a number of projects of particular relevance to the medium-term strategic and institutional plan and enhanced normative and operational framework action plan. She stressed that the report constituted a first attempt at reporting and contained information on
projects of the Regional and Technical Cooperation Division only; projects emanating from other divisions in the agency would be covered in future reports.

7. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Deputy Executive Director for her presentation and welcomed the report. A number of representatives pointed to the lack of regional balance in the geographical spread of UN-Habitat projects.

8. One representative, endorsed by several others, said that a regular snapshot of the organization’s work on the ground would prove extremely useful. He noted, however, that the report was of limited value as it described only selected projects; acknowledging possible resource constraints, he suggested that the report should describe all projects. He pointed to the lack of qualitative detail in the report and suggested that the secretariat to adhere to the principles of results-based management the report could be improved. It would be worthwhile to describe activities that had been successful and those that had been less so, actions by project managers to tackle difficulties and lessons learned.

9. One representative welcomed the open manner adopted by the Deputy Executive Director in discussing reports. He expressed his support for the inclusion of other divisions’ activities in future reports. He sought clarification on the relationship of the projects highlighted in the report to Habitat country programme documents and to the work programme and budget. He drew attention to the various reports being produced and asked whether synergies between them were being exploited.

10. Another representative pointed to the discrepancy in the level of information provided for projects and suggested that more rather than less detail should be included. Several representatives sought clarification on criteria for the choice of projects; one asked about the risks associated with project choice, especially in relation to the level of financing required to attain project objectives. Another asked about the relative success of projects supported by local authorities and those supported by the private sector. He drew attention to the importance of the inclusion of the gender aspect in projects.

11. One representative noted that his country was preparing a comprehensive plan for earthquake preparedness; he would be submitting a request to UN-Habitat to undertake capacity-building on earthquake preparedness in his country and details would be forthcoming shortly.

12. One representative described his country’s support for UN-Habitat over previous years, including through hosting the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific since 1997 and providing support thereto. He reiterated the importance of understanding lessons learned and suggested that the Committee should listen to the views of staff members working in the field and endeavour to provide better guidance to them.

13. Another representative noted with satisfaction the continuing technical cooperation between UN-Habitat and a number of States in his country. He looked forward to closer cooperation and improved delivery at the country level.

14. One representative recalled that UN-Habitat and her Government had signed an agreement in April 2005 creating a UN-Habitat office in her capital, reporting on the outcomes of an advisory meeting of that office. The full report of the meeting was available for distribution to interested representatives, she said.

15. Another representative suggested that member States would benefit from a mechanism to inform them, through the Committee, of areas of interest for possible UN-Habitat projects and exploratory visits to countries. He noted that Latin America and the Caribbean were working to establish a disaster response task force; his country had presented a roster of persons to be trained in that regard and training workshops were planned during the fifth session of the World Urban Forum.

16. One representative welcomed the more dynamic, focused approach adopted by UN-Habitat over recent months, reflected in the strengthening of relationships between UN-Habitat and Eastern European countries. His Government would be willing to assume a coordinating role for those member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States not represented in Nairobi.

17. Responding to comments, the Deputy Executive Director stressed that the secretariat would continue to work on refining future reports. It was clear, she said, that the report’s quality could be improved, including through the inclusion of information on lessons learned, challenges and criteria for assessing project quality, outcomes, achievements and links to the programme of work. She expressed her commitment to working to improve regional balance in projects and highlighted the importance of UN-Habitat involvement in decentralization processes.
18. Mr. Daniel Biau, Director of the Regional and Technical Cooperation Division, thanked representatives for their comments; he agreed that the reporting process was iterative and would be improved based on those comments. Details had been omitted from the report in the interests of brevity, but more information would be included in future, including on generic and technically substantive challenges. As part of the medium-term strategic and institutional plan, a selected evaluation of between six and eight projects would be undertaken. He drew attention to a project in Bangladesh on urban poverty reduction that aimed to improve the lives of 3 million slum-dwellers and welcomed possible new projects related to earthquakes in that country. Drawing attention to the information set out in the last column of the table set forth in the report that described the organization’s funding agencies, he described the organization’s funding as evolving and unpredictable and noted that mobilizing resources was difficult, as UN-Habitat staff members were required to be both technical experts and fund-raisers. The organization continued to face funding challenges; the current mode of funding was clearly unsustainable in the long term. UN-Habitat was the only agency that mobilized resources at the country level without seed capital from its headquarters.

19. He said that, in addition to country-level work, UN-Habitat was also working at the subregional and regional levels and through South-South cooperation. Guidelines on decentralization and on access to basic services had been adopted by the Governing Council in 2007 and 2009, respectively, and were currently available in English. He expressed the organization’s interest in working with the Government of Cuba on South-South cooperation activities; the regional office for Latin America and the Pacific was located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and contact was maintained with countries through Habitat Programme Managers. He drew attention to recent UN-Habitat activities in Central Asia. He stressed that information on the full complement of UN-Habitat projects was provided to the Governing Council at its biennial meetings; the quarterly reports served to present updates on projects that had been opened or closed during the period. UN-Habitat worked with local authorities and small-scale contractors in housing and service provision worldwide. While the international private sector was involved in funding, it had no role in implementing projects.

20. One representative said that it would be useful to discuss the modalities for the preparation of a detailed report; he was not, he said, in favour of a long arduous process that would divert the secretariat’s attention from delivering activities on the ground.

21. The representative of China expressed his gratitude for the participation of UN-Habitat staff at a meeting held in his country on 19 September 2009; he thanked Mr. Bert Diphoorn in particular.

**Item 4: Governance of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

22. Introducing the item, the chair of the contact group on the terms of reference for a governance review of UN-Habitat said that the draft terms of reference had been developed by a drafting group comprising Committee and Secretariat members. He described the process of development of the draft and stressed that the group had intended that the steps proposed would be achievable prior to the twenty-third session of the Governing Council. He highlighted the main elements of the draft terms of reference and noted that, subject to the Committee’s endorsement of the draft, members were requested to join the implementation and assessment teams.

23. One representative sought confirmation that consideration of alternative governance structures would be carried out in accordance with resolution 22/5 on governance of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. On indicative costs, set out on page 8 of the draft, he sought clarification that the work described in the terms of reference would be implemented within the work programme and budget for the biennium 2010–2011. He cautioned that an alternative governance structure might influence the organization’s relationships within the United Nations system, including with the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. He requested the secretariat to ensure that ample time was accorded for consideration and discussion of that issue by member States.

24. Several representatives welcomed the draft terms of reference and the exemplary manner in which the contact group had conducted its work.

25. Several representatives underlined the challenge of providing human resources to the governance review process and stressed the crucial importance of interest from member States to the endeavour’s success. One representative pointed to the need for regional balance and resources in future work on the governance review, calling upon representatives to maintain momentum in that regard. While the review was designed to consider elements of governance of UN-Habitat rather than to serve as a management review, improvement or modification of management practices would be legitimate.
26. One representative sought clarification on the procedure for participating in continuing work on the governance review.

27. Another representative noted that Governing Council decision 22/5 provided that the human and financial resources required for work on a governance review must be undertaken within the work programme and budget 2010–2011. He suggested that support for marginal costs could be provided by donor countries.

28. The representative of the secretariat confirmed that the work to be undertaken was in line with the provisions of resolution 22/5; there had been considerable discussion within the drafting group in that regard, particularly for phase 3, and there had been agreement that the governance review conformed with the work programme and the medium-term strategic and institutional plan. Direct financial costs would be drawn from the medium-term strategic and institutional plan allocations. Costs provided to date were highly indicative and it was to be hoped that they would not increase significantly.

29. The secretariat and the drafting group were aware of the sensitive nature of the organization’s relationships with other United Nations entities; that aspect of the review would be approached with caution. It would be important to consider the outcomes of phase 2 in that regard. To achieve regional balance, the inclusion of at least one member from each regional group in the implementation team would be required. The contact group – the body that would oversee the governance review – was open-ended. Committee members could present themselves for participation at meetings of the group. For membership of the implementation team, regional groups should make their nominations, but individual self-nominations were also acceptable.

30. The Committee approved the terms of reference for a governance review of UN-Habitat.

**Item 5: Terms of reference for the medium-term strategic and institutional plan peer review**

31. The Deputy Executive Director recalled that the terms of reference for the medium-term strategic and institutional plan peer review had been prepared by the secretariat in response to Governing Council resolution 21/2, in close collaboration with Habitat Agenda partners. The terms of reference, as set out in document HSP/CPR/34/5, had been discussed and approved by the medium-term strategic and institutional plan steering committee and subsequently submitted to the Committee’s working group on the matter for a detailed review. The group’s recommendations had been incorporated and the final terms of reference were currently before the Committee for approval.

32. One representative sought confirmation that the work under the terms of reference would be carried out within the work programme and budget process for 2010–2011 approved by the Governing Council. The Deputy Executive Director explained that that was indeed the case.

33. The Committee approved the terms of reference for the medium-term strategic and institutional plan peer review as set out in the document, thereby permitting the review process to begin.


34. The Deputy Executive Director said that the past four sessions of the World Urban Forum had been reviewed in response to Governing Council resolution 22/10 with the aim of examining the lessons learned from those sessions and of improving future sessions’ planning and effectiveness. The review had been undertaken by a senior consultant, Ms. Nefise Bazoglu, working with the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit under the guidance of Mr. BiAu.

35. Ms. Bazoglu had interviewed many UN-Habitat staff members, a variety of important partners and several permanent representatives. A results-based evaluation model had been adopted for the review, the key recommendations of which were set out in document HSP/CPR/34/6. The draft report had been submitted to the Committee’s working group on 14 September 2009 and subsequently amended to incorporate the group’s views. Several recommendations from the review were already feeding into the preparatory process for the forthcoming session of the Forum, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in March 2010.

36. In the ensuing discussion, all the representatives who spoke commended the report. The representative of Brazil welcomed the recommendations and assured the Committee that, even though
the forthcoming session was already being organized, his Government would implement as many recommendations as it could.

37. Several representatives drew attention to the disclaimer attached to the report, which noted that the findings and conclusions remained those of the consultant and did not necessarily reflect the official UN-Habitat position. A number of representatives described the report as a starting point and said that it should be considered in more detail in the working groups. They requested a management response from the secretariat.

38. Several representatives expressed concern at the tendency to provide funding for the Forum without a clear budget and welcomed the recommendation that there should be greater transparency in future. One representative sought clarification and discussions on the allocation of Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation funding to the Forum. Another called for better financial security, proposing the possibility of a fixed sum being allocated to the Forum from the Foundation.

39. One representative said that the country selection process was not transparent; the procedure to be followed if there were competing bids to host the Forum was unclear and the Committee needed to be assured that the process was fair and equal. Interest was also expressed in the recommendation for a hybrid form of bidding system.

40. One representative welcomed the emphasis given to the importance of funding the participation of least developed countries in the Forum, noting that many countries were unable to attend owing to lack of funds. Another sought clarification of recommendation No. 3, in particular concerning the link between the number of staff members travelling for sessions and their accountability for specific Forum results.

41. One representative suggested a need to maintain a thematic coherence between the events taking place at the Forum, including exhibitions. Another said that he would welcome further UN-Habitat management thinking on the future vision for the Forum and its relation to the Governing Council meetings in terms of timing and outcomes.

42. In her response, the Deputy Executive Director informed the representatives that the management response was currently being prepared and would be shared with them. The secretariat also supported the recommendations, but issues raised by the representatives needed to be discussed, such as the budget, vision for the future, timing and host country selection, and she proposed that a working group meeting should be organized for that purpose.

43. Mr. Biau underlined the secretariat’s full support for the report, noting that the recommendations on the budget and host country selection were particularly important. He highlighted the recommendation that the budget should be discussed with the Committee. The secretariat remained of the view that the Forum’s biennial timing was most appropriate in the light of its mandate to advise the Executive Director and feed into the Governing Council.

44. The Committee took note of the report and the comments made and endorsed the convening of a working group to discuss the management response to the report.

**Item 7: Status of preparations for the fifth session of the World Urban Forum**

45. The Deputy Executive Director presented an update on preparations for the fifth session of the Forum, which, she said, were well on track. The theme of the Forum, “The right to the city – bridging the urban divide”, was informing all aspects of the programme, which comprised 6 dialogues, 12 break-out thematic debates, 12 round tables, some 150 networking events, 24 training events and numerous other side events. Official invitations to Governments and United Nations agencies had been dispatched with copies attached of the Forum brochure that had been circulated to the Committee. She outlined a number of aspects of the preparations, stressing in particular the development of the website; she encouraged online registration and participation in the pre-Forum e-debate, which was a new feature. In addition, she briefly described the proposed training events, round tables and networking events; further details of those were available online. The World Urban Youth Assembly and Gender Equality Action Assembly, an integral part of the Forum, would take place prior to the session. The layout and specifications of the exhibition halls were still being worked out and would also be available online.

46. On budget and financing, she said that progress had been made by the host Government to secure the sum of $2.9 million, which would be transferred to UN-Habitat once the legal framework had been agreed upon. The customary invitations to Governments to support participation, especially travel
costs for participants from least developed countries, would be dispatched shortly. In conclusion, she expressed appreciation to the Government of Brazil for being a highly engaged and committed host.

47. The representative of Brazil informed the Committee that the host country agreement had almost been finalized and it was expected that funds would be transferred in the coming weeks. He noted that the venue was being renovated and was in itself a case study of how a degraded area of a city could be reintegrated into urban life. He thanked Ms. Mariam Yumusa, Coordinator of the World Urban Forum, for her leading role and said that the next UN-Habitat mission to Brazil would likely take place in early October 2009.

48. One representative thanked the Deputy Executive Director for her report and the Government of Brazil for hosting the Forum and for making impressive progress in concluding the host country agreement and mobilizing funding. The renovation of the Forum venue was a lesson in upgrading for developing countries.

**Item 8: Preparations for the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly**

49. The Deputy Executive Director presented to the Committee the edited version of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), contained in document A/64/260. The document was devoted largely to the outcome of the Governing Council; progress on other issues had been covered in pre-session documents for the Governing Council that had been presented earlier in 2009. The agenda item would be considered at the current session of the General Assembly, on 3 November 2009. The statement by the Executive Director would be circulated on or around the same date and the Committee would be informed of further developments.

50. The Committee took note of the report.

**Item 9: Quarterly report on financial status of UN-Habitat**

51. The Deputy Executive Director gave a summary of the financial situation of UN-Habitat as set out in document HSP/CPR/34/9. Annual general purpose (non-earmarked) income was currently projected at $20 million, of which pledges amounting to $11.2 million had been received and the balance of $8.8 million was expected based on historical trends and negotiations with donors. She drew attention, however, to the fact that to date only $6.2 million had actually been paid. She expressed her gratitude to the Governments of Barbados, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Kenya, Norway, Pakistan and the Russian Federation for having paid their contributions. She also expressed her appreciation for the earmarked contributions received for continuing post-conflict, post-disaster and poverty alleviation efforts in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the occupied Palestinian territories, Pakistan, Somalia and the Sudan.

52. UN-Habitat continued to face a number of financial challenges, namely the organization’s reliance on voluntary contributions, the relatively narrow donor base and the imbalance between non-earmarked and earmarked contributions. She called upon member States to assist in increasing the predictability of UN-Habitat financial resources by providing multi-year financing frameworks and she expressed her gratitude to the Governments of Norway and Sweden for adopting that approach. She also thanked the Government of the United States of America for increasing its financial support for UN-Habitat.

53. The Committee took note of the report.

**Item 10: Other matters**

54. The Deputy Executive Director said that an international seminar for sustainable public transport for Africa would take place in Nairobi on 10 and 11 November 2009.

55. Mr. Nicholas You, Strategic Policy Adviser, said that the first steering committee meeting for the World Urban Campaign would take place in Barcelona, Spain, from 12 to 14 October 2009. Some 50 partners were expected to attend, with a considerable presence from the private sector. The outcome of the meeting would be reported to the Committee.

56. The representative of Spain announced the candidature of Mr. Joan Clos, former mayor of Barcelona, for the post of Executive Director of UN-Habitat.
Item 11: Closure of the meeting

57. The Chair declared the meeting closed at 12.45 p.m. on Thursday, 24 September 2009.