Summary Report of the UNACLA Exchange with the Cardoso Panel
(Geneva, Palais des Nations, 10 December 2003)

1. Objectives:

On 10 December 2003, UNACLA met with the members of the High-level Panel on the Civil Society, chaired by H.E. Henrique Cardoso, Former President of Brazil, at the Palais de Nations, headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva.

This special event was one of a series of consultations undertaken by the Panel since its establishment by the Secretary General with the tasks (i) to consult with important partners of the United Nations system, including Mayors and leaders of the Local Authority Associations, (ii) to listen to their concerns regarding the United Nations partnership with the civil society, (iii) to collect their proposals in relation with the ongoing reforms of the United Nations system, and (iv) to make recommendations as to how to improve the collaboration between the UN and the civil society.

The opportunity of such an exchange between the members of the Panel and representatives of the Local Authorities through UNACLA, can be considered as one of the milestones in the history of UNACLA towards its international recognition. UNACLA was created by resolution 17/18 of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT as an advisory body to strengthen the dialogue with Local Authorities and their Associations involved in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda around the world.

2. Substantive outcome

- Following introductory remarks by Mayor Clos and Mr. Biau on behalf of UNACLA and its Secretariat, and by H.E. Mr. Cardoso, on behalf of the Panel, and after a tour de table, which provided the participants with the opportunity to introduce themselves, the meeting went on to consider substantive issues.

- UNACLA members briefed the Panel on the considerable work achieved by the representatives of Local Authorities and their Associations in partnership with the United Nations through the Committee and UN-HABITAT. The Chairman of UNACLA, Mayor Clos and the President of WACLAC, Ms. Bresso elaborated on various stages of this partnership. Since the HABITAT II Conference in 1996, Local Authorities and their Associations had engaged in a process of unification in order to be able to speak with one voice and to make more impact at the national and international levels. In the aftermath of the HABITAT II Conference, this process of unification materialized with the creation of WACLAC as a coordinating mechanism for the
activities of Local Authorities at the international level, and the establishment of UNACLA as an advisory committee to the United Nations following a resolution of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT adopted in 1999 to make the voices of Local Authorities heard within the UN system. The work of UNACLA had been widely recognized by relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies.

- UNACLA members stressed the leading role of UN-HABITAT as the UN system’s focal point for Local Authorities. In this connection, the Chairman of UNACLA also quoted the Secretary General of the UN, who requested the representatives of the Local Authorities in June 2001 to work closely with UN-HABITAT as their entry point into the UN system. Therefore, UNACLA played an instrumental role in strengthening the partnership between the UN system and the representatives of the Local Authority community. It also provided the Local Authorities with a specific voice within the UN system and contributed significantly to their efforts of unification which will lead to the creation of the new world Organization of “United Cities and Local Governments”, in Paris, in May 2004. In a brief presentation, the President of WACLAC further elaborated on the unification process of IULA and FMCU/UTO of which the new world organization will emerge.

- Local Authorities had played an instrumental role in the implementation of global agendas. The international community had become aware that if national governments take decisions, it is the responsibility of local governments to implement them. Once again, the representatives of Local Authorities reiterated their message of hope to be taken for what they are namely as local governments and not as NGOs. Therefore, after playing a consultative and advisory role, UNACLA members expressed their wish to be given a much more active role at the international level.

- UNACLA members also expressed the wish to revitalize the work done on the “world chart of local-self government”. In this connection, they asked for the support of the UN system and the Secretary General to facilitate the process of its adoption by member States. They also asked for the support of the UN to expand the international dialogue on decentralization and to engage in a more active alliance with Local Authorities. It was also proposed to intensify the work of UNACLA and to strengthen its structure. Local Authorities and members of UNACLA stressed the wish to become more “credible partners” of the United Nations and offered to take part in the development of UN agendas without interfering with member States.

- Local Authorities recognized the value of UN-HABITAT’s Global Campaign on Urban Governance as an appropriated framework for promoting good governance. It clearly transpired that this campaign and a strengthened UNACLA coulds ensure that the voices of cities are better heard and taken into account by institutions that are in charge of sustainable development. In this connection, it was further recommended that a regular annual meeting of UNACLA with the Secretary General of the United Nations could contribute to the strengthening of the Committee’s profile at the international level. It was also demanded to intensify efforts of exchange of information and best practices in the context of programmes of decentralised cooperation. Dubai Award and the Cities Alliance were mentioned as good means of exchanging best practices. The Municipality of Dubai informed the audience of a new component of the Dubai Awar, which will reward the best practices in response to the challenges of the information society.
• On behalf of the Secretariat of UNACLA, the Deputy Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, Mr. Biau congratulated the Panel on the initiative of calling for such an important exchange with UNACLA. He briefly elaborated on UN-HABITAT’s efforts to strengthen the role and the status of Local Authorities since the HABITAT II Conference. He provided participants with historic background information on the creation of UNACLA and its Secretariat. He pointed out the special nature of the “dialogues” established after Istanbul in the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT and during the preparatory process to Istanbul + 5, where representatives of Local Authorities and of the civil society, including NGOs, met and discussed issues of relevance to their activities. These dialogues had proven to be efficient and were now institutionalized in UN-HABITAT’s international proceedings. He finally stressed the importance given by UN-HABITAT’s to its partnership with Local Authorities and went on to explain rules 63 and 64 of the new rules of procedure of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT related to this issue.

• Considering the special nature of the mission of the Panel, all parties understood that no decision could be taken at such an exchange. Except for some personal feed-back from the Panel members on major points raised by UNACLA, the Panel further referred to its recommendations to the Secretary General of the United Nations on the entire process of consultations with the various stakeholders of the civil society community.