Introductory Statement by Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director

Report on the Deliberations at the 65th Session of the General Assembly

Agenda Item 7

HSP/CPR/39/7
Nairobi, 16 December 2010
Mr. Chair,
Excellencies
and Distinguished Delegates,

I wish to take this opportunity to brief the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the deliberations of the agenda item on UN-Habitat by the General Assembly at its 65th session. This year, two reports were presented before the Second Committee of the General Assembly on the 2nd of November.

The first was the “Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Outcome of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and Strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)”. This report has been distributed to you.

The second was the “Report of the Secretary-General on the Coordinated Implementation of the Habitat Agenda”. This second report has also been distributed to you. This report had, in fact, been submitted earlier during the year to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for consideration. So the discussion in the Second Committee of the General Assembly focused on the first report.

I am happy to inform you that these reports were received well by the Second Committee. In my statement to the Committee, I highlighted progress made by UN-Habitat in addressing the operative paragraphs of General Assembly resolution 64/207, titled “Implementation of the outcome of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and Strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)”.

I started by highlighting the major demographic, economic, environmental, spatial and institutional challenges that are shaping the twenty-first century urbanization process. These challenges have been identified in our most recent flagship reports, the Global Report on Human Settlements 2009 and the State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011.

In light of these challenges, I stressed the need for Governments to assess progress made towards attainment of the Habitat Agenda goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development. I further emphasized that this was the rationale for the proposal to convene a third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III).

I went on to explain that the Millennium Development Goals target of improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 had already been exceeded two times over. But I also highlighted the inconvenient truth that slums are still growing too fast, and that 830 million people in the world still lived in urban slums. In this context, I stressed the need for a new framework for intensified efforts in slum prevention and upgrading, beyond the current Millennium Development Goals target on slums.

I then proceeded to highlight the main achievements under each of the six focus areas of the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan for 2008 to 2013. I also pledged to prioritize core activities of UN-Habitat’s mandate, while responding to emerging global challenges that have a significant impact on cities, towns and villages. My full statement to the Second Committee of the General Assembly has been distributed to you.
In responding, all delegates who spoke recognized the significance of recent trends in human settlements. Most highlighted the following trends: rapid urbanization, urban sprawl, proliferation of mega-cities, increasing difficulties faced by the urban poor, environmental effects of climate change, as well as increasing frequency and magnitude of natural and human-made disasters. They stressed that these trends worsened urban inequality and marginalization of the world’s most vulnerable.

Delegations recognized the unique and pivotal role that UN-HABITAT plays in the overall pursuit of sustainable development, particularly with regards to the Millennium Development Goals targets on slum dwellers as well as on safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Delegations recognized progress made in the implementation of UN-Habitat’s Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan for 2008 – 2013. They also recognized progress made with the Experimental Reimbursable Seeding Operations.

Delegations also recognized the good efforts of UN-Habitat in fundraising. However, they expressed concern at the low levels of funding, unpredictability of contributions and dependence on a small number of donors. They saw all of these as hampering the efficiency and effectiveness of the Programme’s operations.

Distinguished Representatives,

I would like to conclude my statement by informing you about progress made with the draft resolution on the UN-Habitat agenda item. At the time I left New York, the draft resolution had been put forward for informal discussion by country delegations. The draft has now been considered and agreed upon by the Second Committee. The text of this draft has already been distributed to you. The final text will be distributed once the resolution is adopted by the General Assembly.

I wish to draw your attention to operative paragraph 4 of this draft resolution. In this paragraph, the General Assembly invites the Governing Council to consider appropriate global and national strategies and frameworks for future work on the improvement of the lives of slum dwellers, given that the Millennium Development Goals target on slums has already been achieved. This is in follow up to paragraph 77 (k) of the Millennium Development Summit outcome document, A/65/L.1, which has already been circulated to you.

I thank you for your kind attention.