

The Vancouver Declaration On Human Settlements



From the report of Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Vancouver, Canada, 31 May to 11 June 1976

HABITAT: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements,

Aware that the Conference was convened following recommendation of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly, particularly resolution 3128 (XXVIII) by which the nations of the world expressed their concern over the extremely serious condition of human settlements, particularly that which prevails in developing countries,

Recognizing that international co-operation, based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, has to be developed and strengthened in order to provide solutions for world problems and to create an international community based on equity, justice and solidarity.

Recalling the decisions of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, as well as the recommendations of the World Population Conference, the United Nations World Food Conference, the Second General Conference of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Conference of the International Women's Year; the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the sixth special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations and the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States that establish the basis of the New International Economic Order,

Noting that the condition of human settlements largely determines the quality of life, the improvement of which is a prerequisite for the full satisfaction of basic needs, such as employment, housing, health services, education and recreation,

Recognizing that the problems of human settlements are not isolated from the social and economic development of countries and that they cannot be set apart from existing unjust international economic relations,

Being deeply concerned with the increasing difficulties facing the world in satisfying the basic needs and aspirations of peoples consistent with principles of human dignity,

Recognizing that the circumstances of life for vast numbers of people in human settlements are unacceptable, particularly in developing countries, and that, unless positive and concrete action is taken at national and international levels to find and implement solutions, these conditions are likely to be further aggravated, as a result of:

Inequitable economic growth, reflected in the wide disparities in wealth which now exist between countries and between human beings and which condemn millions of people to a life of poverty, without satisfying the basic requirements for food, education, health services, shelter, environmental hygiene, water and energy;

Social, economic, ecological and environmental deterioration which are exemplified at the national and international levels by inequalities in living conditions, social segregation, racial discrimination, acute unemployment, illiteracy, disease and poverty, the breakdown of social relationships and traditional cultural values and the increasing degradation of life-supporting resources of air, water and land;

World population growth trends which indicate that numbers of mankind in the next 25 years would double, thereby more than doubling the need for food, shelter and all other requirements for life and human dignity which are at the present inadequately met:

Uncontrolled urbanization and consequent conditions of overcrowding, pollution, deterioration and psychological tensions in metropolitan regions;

Rural backwardness which compels a large majority of mankind to live at the lowest standards of living and contribute to uncontrolled urban growth;

Rural dispersion exemplified by small scattered settlements and isolated homesteads which inhibit the provision of infrastructure and services, particularly those relating to water, health and education;

Involuntary migration, politically, racially, and economically motivated, relocation and expulsion of people from their national homeland.

Recognizing also that the establishment of a just and equitable world economic order through necessary changes in the areas of international trade, monetary systems, industrialization, transfer of resources, transfer of technology, and the consumption of world resources, is essential for socio-economic development and improvement of human settlement, particularly in developing countries,

Recognizing further that these problems pose a formidable challenge to human understanding, imagination, ingenuity and resolve, and that new priorities to promote the qualitative dimensions to economic development, as well as a new political commitment to find solutions resulting in the practical implementation of the New International Economic Order, become imperative:

I. OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

1. Mankind must not be daunted by the scale of the task ahead. There is need for awareness of and responsibility for increased activity of the national Governments and international community, aimed at mobilization of economic resources, institutional changes and international solidarity by:

- (a) Adopting bold, meaningful and effective human settlement policies and spatial planning strategies realistically adapted to local conditions;
- (b) Creating more livable, attractive and efficient settlements which recognize human scale, the heritage and culture of people and the special needs of disadvantaged groups especially children, women and the infirm in order to ensure the provision of health, services, education, food and employment within a framework of social justice;
- (c) Creating possibilities for effective participation by all people in the planning, building and management of their human settlements;
- (d) Developing innovative approaches in formulating and implementing settlement programmes through more appropriate use of science and technology and adequate national and international financing;
- (e) Utilizing the most effective means of communications for the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of human settlements;
- (f) Strengthening bonds of international co-operation both regionally and globally;
- (g) Creating economic opportunities conducive to full employment where, under healthy, safe conditions, women and men will be fairly compensated for their labour in monetary, health and other personal benefits.

2. In meeting this challenge, human settlements must be seen as an instrument and object of development. The goals of settlement policies are inseparable from the goals of every sector of social and economic life. The solutions to the problems of

human settlements must therefore be conceived as an integral part of the development process of individual nations and the world community.

3. With these opportunities and considerations in mind, and being agreed on the necessity of finding common principles that will guide Governments and the world community in solving the problems of human settlements, the Conference proclaims the following general principles and guidelines for action.

II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The improvement of the quality of life of human beings is the first and most important objective of every human settlement policy. These policies must facilitate the rapid and continuous improvement in the quality of life of all people, beginning with the satisfaction of the basic needs of food, shelter, clean water, employment, health, education, training, social security without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, ideology, national or social origin or other cause, in a frame of freedom, dignity and social justice.

2. In striving to achieve this objective, priority must be given to the needs of the most disadvantaged people.

3. Economic development should lead to the satisfaction of human needs and is a necessary means towards achieving a better quality of life, provided that it contributes to a more equitable distribution of its benefits among people and nations. In this context particular attention should be paid to the accelerated transition in developing countries from primary development to secondary development activities, and particularly to industrial development.

4. Human dignity and the exercise of free choice consistent with over-all public welfare are basic rights which must be assured in every society. It is therefore the duty of all people and Governments to join the struggle against any form of colonialism, foreign aggression and occupation, domination, apartheid and all forms of racism and racial discrimination referred to in the resolutions as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

5. The establishment of settlements in territories occupied by force is illegal. It is condemned by the international community. However, action still remains to be taken against the establishment of such settlements.

6. The right of free movement and the right of each individual to choose the place of settlement within the domain of his own country should be recognized and safeguarded.

7. Every State has the sovereign and inalienable right to choose its economic system, as well as its political, social and cultural system, in accordance with the will of its people, without interference, coercion or external threat of any kind.

8. Every State has the right to exercise full and permanent sovereignty over its wealth, natural resources and economic activities, adopting the necessary measures for the planning and management of its resources, providing for the protection, preservation and enhancement of the environment.

9. Every country should have the right to be a sovereign inheritor of its own cultural values created throughout its history, and has the duty to preserve them as an integral part of the cultural heritage of mankind.

10. Land is one of the fundamental elements in human settlements. Every State has the right to take the necessary steps to maintain under public control the use, possession, disposal and reservation of land. Every State has the right to plan and regulate use of land, which is one of its most important resources, in such a way that the growth of population centres both urban and rural are based on a comprehensive land use plan. Such measures must assure the attainment of basic goals of social and economic reform for every country, in conformity with its national and land tenure system and legislation.

11. The nations must avoid the pollution of the biosphere and the oceans and should join in the effort to end irrational exploitation of all environmental resources, whether non-renewable or renewable in the long term. The environment is the common heritage of mankind and its protection is the responsibility of the whole international community. All acts by nations and people should therefore be inspired by a deep respect for the protection of the environmental resources upon which life itself depends.

12. The waste and misuse of resources in war and armaments should be prevented. All countries should make a firm commitment to promote general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, in particular in the field of nuclear disarmament. Part of the resources thus released should be utilized so as to achieve a better quality of life for humanity and particularly the peoples of developing countries.

13. All persons have the right and the duty to participate, individually and collectively in the elaboration and implementation of policies and programmes of their human settlements.

14. To achieve universal progress in the quality of life, a fair and balanced structure of the economic relations between States has to be promoted. It is therefore essential to implement urgently the New International Economic Order, based on the Declaration and Programme of Action approved by the General Assembly in its sixth special session, and on the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States.

15. The highest priority should be placed on the rehabilitation of expelled and homeless people who have been displaced by natural or man-made catastrophes, and especially by the act of foreign aggression. In the latter case, all countries have the duty to fully co-operate in order to guarantee that the parties involved allow the return of displaced persons to their homes and to give them the right to possess and enjoy their properties and belongings without interference.

16. Historical settlements, monuments and other items of national heritage, including religious heritage, should be safeguarded against any acts of aggression or abuse by the occupying Power.

17. Every State has the sovereign right to rule and exercise effective control over foreign investments, including the transnational corporations - within its national jurisdiction, which affect directly or indirectly the human settlements programmes.

18. All countries, particularly developing countries, must create conditions which make possible the full integration of women and youth in political, economic and social activities, particularly in the planning and implementation of human settlement proposals and in all the associated activities, on the basis of equal rights, in order to achieve an efficient and full utilization of available human resources, bearing in mind that women constitute half of the world population;

19. International co-operation is an objective and a common duty of all States, and necessary efforts must therefore be made to accelerate the social and economic development of developing countries, within the framework of favourable external conditions, which are compatible with their needs and aspirations and which contains the due respect for the sovereign equality of all States.

III. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

1. It is recommended that Governments and international organizations should make every effort to take urgent action as set out in the following Guidelines:

2. It is the responsibility of Governments to prepare spatial strategy plans and adopt human settlement policies to guide the socio-economic development efforts. Such policies must be an essential component of an over-all development strategy,

linking and harmonizing them with policies on industrialization, agriculture, social welfare, and environmental and cultural preservation so that each supports the other in a progressive improvement in well-being of all mankind.

3. A human settlement policy must seek harmonious integration or co-ordination of a wide variety of components, including, for example, population growth and distribution, employment, shelter, land use, infrastructure and services.

Governments must create mechanisms and institutions to develop and implement such a policy.

4. It is of paramount importance that national and international efforts give priority to improving the rural habitat. In this context, efforts should be made towards the reduction of disparities between rural and urban areas, as needed between regions and within urban areas themselves, for a harmonious development of human settlements.

5. The demographic, natural and economic characteristics of many countries, require policies on growth and distribution of population, land tenure and localization of productive activities to ensure orderly processes of urbanization and arrange for rational occupation of rural space.

6. Human settlement policies and programmes should define and strive for progressive minimum standards for an acceptable quality of life. These standards will vary within and between countries, as well as over periods of time, and therefore must be subject to change in accordance with conditions and possibilities. Some standards are most appropriately defined in quantitative terms, thus providing precisely defined targets at the local and national levels. Others must be qualitative, with their achievement subject to felt need. At the same time, social justice and a fair sharing of resources demand the discouragement of excessive consumption.

7. Attention must also be drawn to the detrimental effects of transposing standards and criteria that can only be adopted by minorities and could heighten inequalities, the misuse of resources and the social, cultural and ecological deterioration of the developing countries.

8. Adequate shelter and services are a basic human right which places an obligation on Governments to ensure their attainment by all people, beginning with direct assistance to the least advantaged through guided programmes of self-help and community action. Governments should endeavour to remove all impediments hindering attainments of these goals. of special importance is the elimination of social and racial segregation, inter alia, through the creation of better balanced

communities, which blend different social groups, occupation, housing and amenities.

9. Health is an essential element in the development of the individual and one of the goals of human settlement policies should be to improve environmental health conditions and basic health services.

10. Basic human dignity is the right of people, individually and collectively, to participate directly in shaping the policies and programmes affecting their lives. The process of choosing and carrying out a given course of action for human settlement improvement should be designed expressly to fulfil that right. Effective human settlement policies require a continuous co-operative relationship between a Government and its people at all levels. It is recommended that national Governments promote programmes that will encourage and assist local authorities to participate to a greater extent in national development.

11. Since a genuine human settlement policy requires the effective participation of the entire population, recourse must therefore be made at all times to technical arrangements permitting the use of all human resources, both skilled and unskilled. The equal participation of women must be guaranteed. These goals must be associated with a global training programme to facilitate the introduction and use of technologies that maximize productive employment.