



HABITAT III INFORMAL HEARINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

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Opening Statement by Dr. Shipra Narang Suri

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Madam co-chairs, Secretary General of the Conference, Members of the Bureau, Representatives of Member States, Representatives of regional bodies, UN agencies and other international organisations, and my fellow civil society representatives.

It is an honour and privilege to be making this statement at the informal hearings on the Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda. I believe I speak for all stakeholders in recognizing and applauding this unprecedented process of open and inclusive dialogue towards Habitat 3, which you, the Bureau and the Secretariat, have together instituted. As I have said earlier, we hope that this will serve as precedent for all future endeavours, agreements, conventions, intergovernmental processes, of the United Nations.

I would also like to congratulate you on the Zero Draft that you have developed and which we have gathered to discuss here over these two days. To try and combine aspiration with pragmatism, vision with action, means of implementation with monitoring and review, is ambitious, to say the least; to achieve the perfect result that satisfies everyone would be nothing short of a miracle! We recognize that. But at the same time, it our role and our responsibility to provide constructive feedback on this draft that would help you improve it, and move forward towards a text that can be approved by consensus in Quito – a consensus, I may add, not just of member states but also civil society, stakeholders and rights holders.

My colleague Prof. Eugenie Birch has already provided you with a background on what GAP is, how it is organized, who it represents, who it speaks for, and what it has achieved in the past year since it was conceived. That's right, it has only been a year since GAP was formed! Let me talk about what GAP is proposing for the New Urban Agenda (which is described in detail in this booklet, Partnerships for the New Urban Agenda, which came out last week in English and is currently being finalized in its Spanish and French forms), and how it relates to the Zero Draft we have before us.

Most other inputs into the urban agenda, whether official or otherwise, highlight the key themes, issues and concerns related to urbanization challenges and trends over the next two decades, that merit inclusion into the New Urban Agenda. Conscious of this fact, the GAP decided to focus its attention on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, and role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in that process, and the mechanics of such partnerships. The principles, enabling factors, and post-Habitat III architecture described in this paper are thus geared towards these elements.

We begin with identifying eight principles that should underpin the New Urban Agenda – it should be rights-based and people-centred; rooted in decent work and socio-economic

inclusion; gender-responsive; planet-sensitive; contextualized; evidence-based; grounded in subsidiarity; and finally, just and participatory. We are pleased to see that many of these principles have found resonance in the Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda presently under discussion, especially in the sections on Vision and Transformative Commitments. As my colleagues from various PCGs will elaborate, however, references to gender and age, rights and discrimination, must be strengthened in these sections.

The GAP document then goes on to list certain enabling factors which will help achieve sustainable, inclusive and just urban development, loosely grouped into four categories, legal and policy frameworks; institutional capacities; fiscal interventions; and technology. We believe this section can provide some useful, specific, inputs to the Zero draft.

For instance, under legal and policy frameworks, we emphasise (among other issues): Inclusive planning and budgeting, illustrated by successful practices such as participatory budgeting or gender budgeting; Facilitating the transition of workers of all ages from the informal to the formal economy, accompanied by appropriate measures for protection of informal workers; Coherent, effective, enforceable, transparent and accountable regulation, covering all involved actors and stakeholders, to prevent and halt corruption and unethical practices in urban development; and Guaranteed access to justice and to equitable remedies to sustainable urban development challenges under the rule of law, and without human rights violations, such as forced evictions. These elements are not adequately addressed in the Zero Draft, some receiving barely a mention.

Under fiscal interventions, we highlight the leveraging of financial resources from different stakeholders through innovative structures and mechanisms, including, for example, land-based financing, ecological tax reform, social impact bonds, progressive taxation, revolving funds of various kinds, community financing, private-sector financing, crowdfunding, public-public partnerships and inter-municipal cooperation. We also emphasise the need for adequate investment in and enforcement of tax avoidance systems to provide national, regional and local governments and their communities with critical resources. We believe that these proposals can help strengthen and deepen the provisions related to financing in the Zero Draft, which are at present rather nebulous.

Moving on, the *Partnerships* document puts forward a set of five proposals for the post-Habitat III architecture for implementation of the New Urban Agenda. These include the establishment of **a knowledge platform, an advocacy mechanism, an innovation laboratory, a monitoring apparatus, and a finance advisory mechanism**. These elements are not random, they have been carefully chosen to reflect the critical areas where stakeholders have the willingness, the capacities, as well as the RIGHT, to contribute. We believe that knowledge does not rest with governments alone, and indeed, innovations do not come from governments alone – they arise from communities, their organisations and networks, from researchers and academics, from professionals, from local authorities and the private sector, and all these actors must be involved in consolidating and presenting knowledge, and testing innovative approaches, that further the goals of sustainable and inclusive urbanization. The importance of strengthening the science-policy interface cannot be overemphasized. We further believe that stakeholders have a right to articulate their views, and to ensure that these views are heard, that they have the right to be involved in all monitoring processes and to advise on where resources are to be invested in the pursuit of sustainable urbanization. They must therefore be a central piece of the puzzle when it comes to follow-up and review. At the moment, while the role of stakeholders is emphasized in the Zero Draft (which we welcome), it is rather imprecise. What will they do?

How will they be involved? Will governments be obliged to set up clearer processes and procedures for stakeholder involvement at all stages of the urban development cycle? Or will they be able to get away with simply re-labelling their existing provisions? The proverbial old wine in new bottles – or rather, old wine in old bottles with new labels, comes to mind! All this needs to be fleshed out must more carefully, if the NUA is to be truly transformative, action-oriented and implementable.

Finally, before I conclude, speaking as an urban planner and on behalf of the community of urban professionals, I would like to flag here one key element that should rightfully be highlighted in the beginning of the NUA, in the Preamble, but is not. A key urban trend and challenge of our times is that the locus of humanitarian crises is shifting to cities. Cities face a range of crises, due to natural and man-made disasters, including the impact of climate change (just over the past ten days we have seen urban floods in cities across Germany, France, Australia and China), every day urban hazards (building collapses, road traffic accidents, construction accidents), as well as conflict and urban violence (there was an article in yesterday's New York Times on the increasing and intensifying urban violence in Chicago)! A New Urban Agenda that doesn't recognise this new urban reality will never be able to achieve truly inclusive and sustainable solutions. Forced migration and urban displacement is driving urban growth in many countries, and creating challenges for national and local policy makers, but this is not the only element of urban humanitarian crises which needs attention. We need to enable urban societies, in particular those most at risk, to prepare for, cope with and recover more quickly from the wide-ranging effects of natural disasters and/or armed conflicts, a principle that has been agreed in the Urban Crisis Charter underpinning the recently launched Global Alliance for Urban Crises. This is not a problem of the global South alone, it affects virtually every country across the planet. Yet, this element is particularly under-emphasised in the Zero Draft, and I urge you to correct this anomaly in future iterations of the NUA, indeed, making it central to the transformative vision you have laid out.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The challenges of urbanization are too large and too complex to be addressed by one actor alone. National governments will need the support of local authorities, all members of the civil society and the private sector, in implementing the New Urban Agenda. We therefore urge member states to give due consideration to the proposals made in the GAP document, and to find ways of incorporating some of our more concrete suggestions into the NUA. We must ensure that the post-Habitat-III world is one that emphasizes and substantiates multi-stakeholder engagement, inclusion and collaborative action, in order to achieve sustainable urbanisation.

Thank you for your attention.