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18–20 September 2006

REPORT OF THE SIXTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Addendum

REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

Executive Summary

The Ministers responsible for housing, spatial planning and land administration met in Geneva on 19 September 2006 under the auspices of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management.

Ministers and heads of delegation from 36 UNECE member countries and representatives of international and non-governmental organizations discussed the challenges confronting urban areas in many countries. The key debate was organized in two panel discussions focusing on the following topics:

- Social and economic integration through human settlements development
- The multi-family housing sector: ownership, maintenance, renewal and management.

The meeting adopted a Ministerial Declaration on Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas in the UNECE Region. The Declaration reconfirms the goals and challenges contained in the UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century. Ministers committed themselves to contributing to social inclusion through the development of affordable housing, to further addressing effective management of multi-family housing estates, and to supporting activities in land administration and spatial planning. It was decided to convene the next high-level meeting in five years' time in order to assess progress in the implementation of these commitments.

Introduction

1. The Ministerial Meeting took place at the Palais des Nations, Geneva (Switzerland), on 19 September 2006.
2. Ministers and representatives from the following countries participated: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.
3. Representatives from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the European Commission and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEDB) participated.
4. The following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended: All-Ukrainian Association of Voluntary Organizations; European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS); International Council of Women (ICW); International Real Estate Federation (FIABCI); International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP); International Union of Tenants (IUT); Tecnoborsa Rome (Development of the Real Estate Economy); World Fire Statistics Center.
5. Members of the Housing and Urban Management Advisory Network (HUMAN) of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management also attended.

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

6. Mr. M. Belka, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. He stressed that this second Ministerial Meeting convened by the Committee – after the first one held in 2000 – was an important opportunity to review the achievements and shortfalls to date and the significant challenges that still lay ahead. The goal of this event was to foster discussion and crystallize thinking on new directions of future policy action to improve housing, urban conditions and land-related management practices in the UNECE region.
7. Ms. M. A. Trujillo Rincon (Spain), Minister of Housing, and Mr. L. Borbely (Romania), Delegate Minister for Public Works and Territorial Planning, were elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson respectively.

II. PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel 1: Social and Economic Integration through Human Settlements Development

8. Ms. M. A. Trujillo Rincon, in her opening remarks for Panel 1, stressed the importance of sustainable urban development based on four pillars: social cohesion, economic development, environmental quality and institutional cooperation. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss and further develop policies in these areas. Touching on the situation in her country, Ms. M. A. Trujillo Rincon pointed out that access to dignified housing was a constitutional right in Spain. She described several national policy initiatives aimed at making housing and real estate markets more transparent; ensuring social cohesion, environmental quality, diversity of tenure structures, and appropriate construction and safety standards; and promoting public-private partnerships.

9. Panel 1 included the following:

- Mr. A. Harutyunyan (Armenia), Minister of Urban Development
- Mr. A. Nichkasov (Belarus), Deputy Minister of Architecture and Construction
- Mr. A. Joldoshev (Kyrgyzstan), Director of the State Agency of Registration of Right to Immovable Property
- Mr. P. Gurtner (Switzerland), Director of the Federal Housing Office
- Mr. A. Karabel (Turkey), Vice President of Housing Development Administration
- Ms. I. Bjork-Klevby (UN-Habitat), Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director
- Mr. M. Hammar (IUT), Secretary-General

10. Theme 1 was introduced by Mr. W. Förster (Austria) based on the discussion paper “Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas of the UNECE Region” (ECE/HBP/2006/3).

11. The panellists presented views and experiences from their countries and organizations, highlighting the role of local governments in achieving social and economic integration, the need to involve the private sector, and the importance of integrating housing policies with other policy areas such as social policy, energy, education, transport and population. They stressed the need to design affordable housing for low-income population groups and effective land management policies. Administrative and legal changes were often required to facilitate this development. Also, the integration of and close cooperation among housing, urban planning and land administration authorities were essential for setting up an effective institutional structure. At the same time, the issue of increasing rural-urban migration had to be addressed. In this context, attention should be given to the construction of new multi-family housing, although the absence of long-term funding facilities often constrained construction activities. Panellists reiterated the need for strong emphasis on the actual implementation of housing policies. They also highlighted participatory urban planning and integrated territorial planning addressing socio-economic issues in conjunction with physical planning as crucial tools to promote socio-economic integration.

12. The discussion and the ensuing interventions were summarized by the rapporteur, Ms. E. Szolgayova (Slovakia).

Panel 2: The Multi-Family Housing Sector: Ownership, Maintenance, Renewal and Management

13. Mr. L. Borbely, in his introductory remarks for panel 2, touched on the introduction of financial schemes in Romania, which combine the resources of central and local governments as well as homeowners' associations to provide low-cost housing and increase energy efficiency in multi-storey buildings. He also described efforts by local governments to finish uncompleted construction and stressed the crucial role of municipalities in the provision of housing at local levels.

14. Panel 2 included the following:

- Mr. J. Khanlarov (Azerbaijan), Chief of the State Construction Control Agency
- Ms. O. Serova (Russian Federation), Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Construction and Housing and Municipal Services
- Mr. M. Miljevic (Serbia), State Secretary, Ministry of Capital Investments
- Mr. M. Janusek (Slovakia), Minister of Construction and Regional Development
- Ms. M. Meunier (CEDB), Director of Research and Analysis
- Mr. G. Gundersen, Expert

15. Theme 2 was introduced by Mr. H. van Eyk (Netherlands), Chairperson of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, based on the discussion paper "Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas of the UNECE Region" (ECE/HBP/2006/3).

16. The panellists stressed the significance of the multi-family housing stock, as it accounts for the majority of the total housing stock and thus affects a large section of the population in the UNECE region. Poor physical condition and a lack of maintenance and management represent serious challenges to policymakers and stakeholders, especially in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE). It was emphasized that the role of the state in funding maintenance of the multi-family housing stock could be more prominent. In the most advanced countries, socio-economic tensions and urban deprivation harm the position of the multi-family housing stock in the housing market. The lack of adequate, forward-looking solutions in this sector may even slow social and economic development. Participants emphasized the importance of consolidating the legal and institutional framework, establishing practical procedures and regulations, strengthening local governments, developing targeted policies and investing in urban infrastructure in order to improve the management and maintenance of the multi-family housing stock. The challenges would not be solved until the issue of multi-family housing was introduced into the national political agendas of the countries concerned. The experience with housing cooperatives in some UNECE countries was highlighted as a way to manage the stock of multifamily housing.

17. The discussion and the ensuing interventions were summarized by the rapporteur, Ms. E. Szolgayova.

III. ADOPTION OF THE MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

18. The adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Social and Economic Challenges in Distressed Urban Areas in the UNECE Region was chaired by Ms. M. A. Trujillo Rincon. Mr. H. van Eyk read out the draft Ministerial Declaration as amended by the drafting group at its meeting on 15 September 2006, including further proposals by delegations for amendments.

19. The Ministerial Declaration (see annex) was adopted by the Ministers and heads of delegation.

IV. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

20. Ms. M. A. Trujillo Rincon summarized the main issues raised during the debate. Cities should strive to become socially inclusive, economically dynamic and environmentally sustainable at the same time. An important objective would be to create more compact cities with effective public transport systems and access to public services. Affordable housing schemes for vulnerable population groups needed to be developed. In particular, housing typologies had to be adapted to the needs of different and diversified population groups. Rational patterns of energy, water and land consumption should be promoted. The continued international exchange of knowledge and experience was seen as a crucial element in tackling the challenges ahead. She thanked the participants and closed the meeting.

Annex

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN DISTRESSED URBAN AREAS IN THE UNECE REGION

**as adopted by Ministers and heads of delegation at the sixty-seventh session of the
Committee on Housing and Land Management
on 19 September 2006**

Introduction

1. The physical environment is important for community cohesion and social interaction. While some UNECE countries have accumulated a wide range of experiences with socially oriented housing programmes and spatial planning practices, in many parts of the UNECE region disadvantaged and deteriorating neighbourhoods lag far behind. In many countries of the region, the upkeep of the multi-family housing stock is becoming ever more urgent, as this type of housing stock represents the majority of all dwellings. Effective integrated housing and land management policies accompanied by community development can help to foster supportive networks and relationships of trust.

Main issues

2. Until recently, it was usually in areas with a large concentration of the working poor and immigrants that social and community support systems were needed to maintain adequate living conditions and levels of social integration. Recently, however, areas of more extreme, multiple deprivations have emerged in many parts of the UNECE region. In some neighbourhoods, persistent high unemployment, poor housing and physical environments, low educational attainment, high crime rates and other socio-economic problems interact to generate decline and distress.

3. Shrinking public resources and the process of economic transformation, in particular in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), pose considerable challenges to meeting the need for affordable and adequate housing. In many of these countries, the prevailing reliance on market forces has not been sufficiently complemented by governments' role in the housing sector. Often privatization of large segments of the multi-family housing stock, built mainly in the period 1960–1990, has created many problems for the new owner-occupants and the local governments in regard to management and maintenance.

4. Significant challenges have also been noticed in Western Europe. Structural economic changes and unemployment have led to urban segregation and the emergence of deprived neighbourhoods. Limited access to public and private services and decreasing human security pose serious challenges to residents. Tightening public budgets have resulted in less investment in social housing.

5. At the same time, the experiences of many countries have proved that a good land administration system guarantees ownership and security of all types of tenure; supports land and

property taxation; provides security for credit; helps to develop and monitor land markets; facilitates the management of state-owned land; improves urban planning and infrastructure development; and provides statistical data in support of good governance.

6. Likewise, adequate spatial planning contributes to improving the local physical, social and economic environment; achieving more efficient patterns of spatial development; controlling urban sprawl; balancing urban expansion and urban regeneration; providing adequate location and provision of infrastructures and facilities; improving transport systems; and promoting participation and community involvement.

7. Informal settlements and distressed urban areas reflect a lack of planning and adequate housing policies. They are characterized by, and the result of, severe economic and social problems. The improvement of living conditions in informal settlements is one of the most complex and pressing challenges facing many UNECE countries today.

Therefore,

WE, MINISTERS AND HEADS OF DELEGATION ATTENDING THE SIXTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE UNECE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT IN GENEVA ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2006,

Recalling, as is stated in the *UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century*, that social cohesion is a process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among the population,

Aware that a failure to establish a political, economic, social and physical environment conducive to a stable and adequate standard of living for all inhabitants of a country may contribute to higher societal costs; political instability; urban insecurity; ethnic conflicts; problems related to migrants, refugees and displaced persons; and the increase of marginalization of groups in society and homelessness, and might eventually threaten the strength of the economic system itself,

Noting that distressed urban areas continue to emerge, since governments have in several instances been too slow to implement policies to address challenges related to housing needs and economic development in such areas,

Convinced that in the context of current demographic trends in the UNECE region, which are characterized by ageing populations and by an increase in migratory movements, policies relating to social cohesion and security should be at the heart of government strategies,

Being also aware that such strategies often require significant changes in the working relations and distribution of responsibilities among all relevant levels of government and non-governmental bodies, as well as in promoting the setting up of effective public/private partnerships, including the strengthening of awareness of individual responsibility,

Recognizing that the management, maintenance and refurbishment of the multi-family housing stock have become major problems in the UNECE region, ones that imply considerable and imminent material and capital losses and social costs, while at the same time being opportunities to improve the quality of life, increase community cohesion and strengthen the local economy,

Recognizing also that urban and spatial information systems should become increasingly open and public, from the highest level of government to the community level, in order to ensure equal access to reliable land and real property information to all people – a development that will facilitate land reform and the functioning of the real estate markets, facilitate the security of ownership and all forms of tenure, and improve spatial planning, infrastructure development and natural disaster prevention and mitigation efforts,

- (i) *Reconfirm* that the goals and challenges contained in the *UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-First Century* continue to be the basis for future programmes of work of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management. This involves effective urban planning and management; the promotion of neighbourhood regeneration (mainly through integrated urban renewal programmes); the refurbishment of the multi-family housing stock; the promotion of access to affordable and adequate housing, infrastructure, facilities and public spaces; and thereby the sustainable improvement of the quality of life for all in the UNECE region;
- (ii) *Commit* ourselves to contributing to social inclusion, through affordable housing development, taking into account the policy recommendations of the UNECE as contained in the *Country Profiles on the Housing Sector*, the *Guidelines on Social Housing* (2006) and other relevant UN recommendations agreed to by the UNECE member States; and through integrating housing policy with other policies, notably those in the areas of land administration, employment, migration, education and gender equality;
- (iii) *Support* work by UNECE on the implementation of housing finance policies for affordable housing, taking into account the UNECE publication *Housing Finance Systems for Countries in Transition* (2005);
- (iv) *Stress* that the issue of effective management of large multi-family housing estates should be further addressed by the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, taking into consideration the need for governments to develop integrated strategies. This entails maintenance, refurbishment, energy saving, rational consumption of land and water, waste management, urban management, neighbourhood improvement, supporting the implementation of the *UNECE Guidelines on Condominium Ownership of Housing for Countries in Transition* (2003) and continuing work in this area;
- (v) *Support* UNECE land management activities aimed at sustainable spatial planning, including issues related to illegal and unregulated construction, informal settlements, land reform and access to land for the poor, and a functioning real estate market through development of cadastral and land registration systems and modernization of spatial

planning systems, noting that spatial planning at all relevant levels is crucial for achieving sustainable urban development;

- (vi) *Emphasize* the importance of continuing the exchange of experiences regarding arrangements for public/private partnerships in the housing and land management sectors on the basis of transparent agreements for sharing risks and benefits, as well as the utilization of multi-sector skills and finance to serve the interests of the public and in particular disadvantaged groups within the population; and
- (vii) *Decide* to convene the next high-level meeting in five years' time in order to assess progress in the implementation of the above commitments.
