



**Presentation of Mr. Christian Friis Bach**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**United Nations Economic Commission of Europe**

**at the**

***BRIEFING and WORKSHOP***

***On Regional Roadmap for HABITAT III Conference for the UNECE Region***

**22 February 2016, 15:00 - 16:00**

**Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room VII**

---

Thank you Ambassador for this introduction and for the presentation of the European Habitat Regional Conference.

- UNECE is committed to support the preparations of this event, organised by the Ministry of Regional Development of Czech Republic in cooperation with the HABITAT III Secretariat. I would like to use this opportunity to thank you for the excellent cooperation with the Ministry and Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic.
- The **European Habitat Conference** is a very important event because the UNECE region is one of the most populated areas in the world and 75% of its population live in cities. The expansion of urban areas is therefore a serious challenge in the Region, which puts pressure on existing land and makes it imperative to develop tools and mechanisms to achieve an optimal configuration of land in terms of space, cost and utility.
- Cities have a profound impact on the environment and climate. The entire process of construction of buildings, from their planning, building through habitation to destruction and disposal, impacts the environment because it is a high consumer of primary resources (land, building material and energy), the largest single source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and an important creator of waste materials. The housing and building sector is responsible for up to 50 percent of the final energy consumption.
- UNECE is active in advising the governments in how to reduce the environmental footprint of cities and promote resilience to climate change and natural disasters. We produced a study on **Climate Neutral Cities and a Casebook on Good Practices on Energy Efficient Housing**, which are used by the countries for shaping their legal frameworks and policies on housing energy efficiency and climate neutrality.
- Last year we completed a survey “**Building Standards and Building Regulations in the UNECE Region**” and are currently working to establish **Task Force on Standards on Energy Efficiency in Buildings**, which will formalize all the partnerships and will support the development and promotion of energy efficiency and resilience-related standards for buildings.
- The historic agreement at **COP21**, last December in Paris, demonstrated that we can address negative impacts of climate change using innovative and smart approaches and technologies and that we are willing to combat it. UNECE jointly with the ITU and other partner

organisations elaborated **Smart Sustainable City Indicators**, which were endorsed by the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management in December 2015.

- The indicators were developed as a tool to evaluate how smart and sustainable a city is and serve as a starting point to implement concrete actions and measures and improve a city's sustainable level. **The list includes 72 indicators**, both core and additional, grouped under three areas: Economy, Environment, and Society & Culture.
- We are currently working on developing **Smart Sustainable Standards**. Application of these standards through the development of smart city profiles will help our cities to address the urban sprawl and make our cities more compact, inclusive and sustainable, since the major challenge for our countries today is granting citizens a decent quality of life, while managing the pressures coming from urbanization, environmental, climate and demographic changes.
- These indicators have already reflected the content of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which were approved in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly. The indicators will be further updated following the adoption by the UN in March 2016 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicators. Therefore, **Smart Sustainable City Indicators will help cities to evaluate their performance against the SDGs**.
- All this work on climate change adaptation, on smart and sustainable cities support the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, which the **UNECE endorsed at its 66<sup>th</sup> Committee Session the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing** in April last year. The Charter's aim is to make housing safer, more affordable, resilient, and available while encouraging investment and growth, by supporting policies and actions and encourages international cooperation at all levels. This instrument demonstrates the commitment by the UNECE members States to address these issues and provide clear guidelines and benchmarks for assessing progress.
- The Charter will be an official input to HABITAT III and its implementation will be an important component of the **New Urban Agenda**.
- UNECE coordinated jointly with the UN-Habitat the **preparation of the HABITAT III Regional Report on Housing and Urban Development for the UNECE Region**, which elaborated strategic recommendations for addressing urban and housing challenges in our region. The report demonstrates that while we are speaking about cities being sustainable and

resilient, we are still far from being there. The report highlights that urban sprawl remains to be a key phenomenon in the UNECE region and indicates a need for stronger urban governance. Cities are struggling to address issues of the demographic changes, including ageing, migration, security, overcoming multiple economic, financial and social problems. It is therefore also our role to support developing capacities of local authorities to managing cities, encouraging the cooperation of cities with national governments and private sector as well as between different departments of city governments.

- The key messages of the Regional Report, which was presented and discussed by Committee on Housing and Land Management at its annual session on December 2015, will be presented in detail later on. They will provide an important regional input into the **New Urban Agenda, which is expected to be adopted by HABITAT III Conference this year.**
- I would like once more to re-iterate that the UNECE is committed to assist the member States in the region in their efforts to promote sustainable urban development in the through its advisory services, capacity building activities and exchange of experiences and best practices. Regional and sub-regional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level. Strengthening regional cooperation will support the implementation of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the monitoring of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; which will both complement the **New Urban Agenda.**

Today's discussion is especially important in the light of the preparations for the **European HABITAT Conference.**

During the European Habitat, UNECE intends to co-organise four side events on the topics of:

1. Implementation of the post-2015 agenda and achieving the SDGs towards the emerging New Urban Agenda;
2. Addressing housing affordability issues in the UNECE Region in the context of economic, financial and migration crises: challenges and good practices;
3. Role of Smart Sustainable Cities in achieving the SDGs on urban development; and
4. Launch of a sub-regional report for CIS countries to HABITAT III.

These events which will be organised in cooperation with our partner agencies demonstrates our commitment to making a stronger UN family in order to support the achievement of sustainable urban development.

The UNECE is a Coordinator of UN Regional Commissions this year. My goal as of the Coordinator of the Regional Commissions is to foster exchange of experiences and knowledge between the five regional commissions and promote collaboration with other regional organisations.

I look forward to see you all in Prague for the European Habitat Conference and I hope that through this Conference we can work together to make cities and both rural and urban environment more sustainable and a better place to live in. Thank you.

---