

World Habitat Day 2011

9:30 a.m.-1.00 p.m: Conference Room 6 (NLB)
UN Headquarters, New York City, New York
High Level Meeting on Cities and Climate Change



As described in the conference Agenda, the purpose of the high level meeting was to bring together high-level experts and representatives from governments, non-governmental organizations, institutes, foundations and industry to identify the challenges and opportunities that a possible future global conference on human settlements and cities, following the tradition of Habitat I and II, should pursue in response to the emerging challenges and the new role of cities.

The draft conference notes from the Summary by James McCullar, Sonay Aykan and Şevin Yıldız are intended to convey the memorable points by the speakers that relate to climate change and agenda for Habitat III.

Opening Session

The opening session set the stage for the *High Level Structured Discussion*.

The conference was opened by **Cecelia Martinez**, Director of UN-HABITAT New York Office, who welcomed participants on behalf of the UN and introduced the speakers in the Opening Session.

H.E. Nasser Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly, delivered the keynote address. He addressed the current pressures on the climate resulting from water use, hazardous gas emissions and other anthropogenic factors. He called on the public sector, civil society and private sector to work together. He pointed out that the developing countries are the most vulnerable to climate change, but we have the opportunity to find solutions that will mitigate its impacts. Both these problems and their solutions are strictly related to the structure of today's cities. Therefore, innovations in cities, such as "zero carbon cities", should be addressed as the primary strategy for solutions. Doing so now will prevent future problems. *Government can not tackle the problems along, but need the private sector to join in finding solutions.*

The Secretary General's World Habitat Day Message was delivered by H.E. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary General.

The SG promised his support for Member States in planning for climate change and sustainable development. *She pointed out the anthropogenic threats that will significantly change the world by 2050: The world population will reach 7 billion this month and this number will increase 50% by 2050. The amount of Green House Gases will also show a significant increase by this year. How our children grow up will depend on the world we will leave for them. The deadly nexus of current rapid growth of urbanization and climate change affects everyone, but especially the small island states affected by rising sea levels including cities like Cairo, New York, Calcutta, Lagos and Amsterdam which is facing serious threats from storm surges.* But the local attempts to promote wind, solar and geothermal energy and the global actions, to limit the global temperature increase by 2 degree Celsius, show that solutions are possible. Migiro stated that Habitat III should be a call for attention to the possibility of these solutions.

Video Message from the United Nations Under-Secretary General and executive director of UN-Habitat, Dr. Joan Clos.

Dr Clos stated that that the world population has reached 7 billion and 50% of this population lives in towns and cities. Environmental disasters such as rising sea levels or draught will trigger migrations and by 2050 there could be 200 million refugees from climate change events. He pointed out that urban poor will be the most vulnerable segment of the society. *Dr. Clos stressed that a comprehensive approach to sustainable planning can lessen the impacts of climate change, and expressed an optimistic message that there are solutions that can be implemented.* Innovations and investment in public transportation, water use, sanitary issues and infrastructural design will be the main components of these solutions. Proliferations of BTR systems and public bicycle systems are already existing examples proving that solutions for environmental problems are possible. This should be the message of HABITAT III.

Aliye Celik, Co-Chair, Consortium for Sustainable Urbanization, gave a brief history of past Habitat conferences. In Habitat I, the emphasis was on action by central governments. *In Habitat II, the emphasis shifted to inclusion of local authorities and non-government organizations, and the role of women, the success of which have set the stage of where we go next.*

High Level Structured Discussion: *Cities and Climate Change: Innovative Solutions Rio+20 and beyond – The case for Habitat III?* In the new era, advancements in technology should be used to promote sustainability in cities. Cities are also important in managing the impact of the recent economic crisis. She stated that looking towards a sustainable future is possible only through cities.

Margaret O'Donoghue Castillo, President, American Institute of Architects (AIA) New York Chapter introduced the discussants and Facilitator, Neal Peirce from the Washington Post Writer's Group.

Mr. Peirce pointed out that the creativity of nations and policies towards sustainability should follow a bottom-up structure. We should turn our focus on the relationship between localities and the nation to try and answer how nations respond to the needs of sustainability. How do different levels of government act coherently and put all the pieces of the puzzle together? He then asked questions of each of the discussants based on their expertise and backgrounds based on a potential agenda for Habitat III and moderated comments from the Ambassadors and other participants. The responses can be grouped into general categories:

1. Community Engagement

- Ana Marie Argilagos, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of International and Philanthropic Innovations, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) brought greetings from President Obama and HUD Secretary Donovan
Expressed the need to leverage ideas and partnerships, to break down silos for collective innovation, to look at regions as well as cities with the need for community engagement. Connectivity and interaction among NGOs, government and the civil society are the building blocks of this engagement. She stated that this relationship can be formed around the *Six Livability Principles* that was established by the Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities (HUD, DOT, EPA, USDA), which will lead to achievements in projects beyond city level planning, such as public transportation, energy regulation, etc. She also mentioned that collaborations between countries are crucial to set a metrics comparability scale, an example of a China-US collaboration. Her emphasis was also on the necessity of looking at rural areas as

part of the regions. She stated that competitions on the federal level for creative sustainability solutions are carried out at HUD.

- Robert Campbell, Architecture Critic, Boston Globe
Emphasizing the relationship between energy use and climate change, he reminded the audience of the vulnerability of the future generations to natural disasters. As a solution to this problem, he *referenced the power of the local community – to look at the memory of what has worked in the past as a guide for the future: “Let’s find what works well today and adopt it for tomorrow, instead of looking for utopias”*
- Bart Harvey, Former Chair & CEO, Enterprise Community Partners
Stated sustainable housing is affordable housing; and organized local communities can be a voice in sustainable planning. It is affordable because:
 - *It saves from transportation cost*
 - *It saves energy*
 - *Prevents cost from climate change*
 - *Allows dense walkable communities*
 - *Reduces poverty, hence decreasing informal relationships.*

There is a disconnection between two worlds (Developed and developing). People with low income are more vulnerable to environmental disasters. They already build in risk zones. Policies for prevention are different from policies for relief and they need to be connected. Therefore, slums should be enforced physically for disasters. These enforcements also include preventions of political corruption and institutional financial order.

- Laurie Kerr, Senior Policy Advisor, Mayor’s Office, NYC
Finds cities are poised to lead, with the political will, expertise and tools. Cities are moving without waiting for state or national solutions. Therefore, the real challenge is getting to scale quickly. Portland, Moscow and Melbourne are good examples.

2. Disaster Planning

- Professor Lance Jay Brown, FAIA, ACSA Distinguished Professor
Professor Brown started by asking a question; how can disasters and innovations be a part of Habitat 3? Reminded that the risks on major living areas derive from socio-environmental problems such as water, flood, migration or resource allocation. These problems will deepen with the adverse effects of the recent climate change, possibly giving way to several disasters. He listed the global risk factors as states of conflicts, seismic activities and migration. Capacity to response to these problems locally without help from outside is hard. However it is possible to mitigate the impacts of these disasters by planning. *Describing work in disaster relief planning and stressed the importance of planning before events happen, he stated that “We must Design for Risk” and to prepare policies to examine the relationships among urbanization, climate change and resilient design.*

3. ICT

- Professor Urs Gauchat, Dean, College of Architecture & Design, NJIT
Habitat II could not have anticipated the role of ICT in developing countries. But today, technology plays a crucial role in the creation of sustainable cities. For example, cell phones have become a social equalizer where everyone has equal access to information that is transforming poor communities. Information on health, commodity prices, banking, etc. is being circulated all over the world through 7 billion cell phones every day. No more developed countries have the monopoly on information, allowing them sell is to the developing countries for an expensive price. Accessibility of the information is more vital than it was before. He proposed adoption of “Unfettered access to information” as the basic theme of HABITAT III because:
 - Information is most important as a basic right,
 - Information is the cornerstone for development,
 - Information is the building stone of an open society.

Accessibility, he states, requires a more efficient use of the IT industry in the future. He also added that the business world has to be involved in this process.

4. Role of the Private Sector

- David A. Lubin, Chairman, Esty Sustainable Network

The difference between 1996 and today is that the corporate sector sees sustainability as a driver of business and they can be new allies. Corporations are committed to sustainable transformation and are part of the solution. Corporations use the concept of “Sustainability Jam” with employees to brain storm innovations for new products. Sustainable cities became new markets for businesses. Corporations go on with transformations to embed sustainability into their business models. Corporations start building their capability for sustainability as their center issues, rather than an auxiliary problem and ask which capabilities need to be built to change the culture in the firm. This is an opportunity to learn from the private experience; therefore cities should form deeper partnerships with those companies to learn how transformation towards sustainability takes place. – This can also be applied to Habitat planning.

5. Role of Culture

- Marian Nicanor, Curator, BMW Guggenheim Lab

Expressed the role of culture and cultural institutions to engage people in their communities to become agents of change. Addressing the infrastructural sustainability, she stated that transformation in urban dynamics is needed for achieving sustainability.

6. Transportation

- Petra Todorovich, Regional Planning Association, Director, America 2050

Stated the importance of transportation in megaregions to connect people and critical services at all levels, from high speed trains to local modes. She also mentioned that not only America but also Europe has become places for mega regions with continuous environments. She underlined that transportation infrastructure has shaped land use patterns and it will continue to do that. Remarks about the future changes: self-sufficiency in agriculture, transportation of goods, forestation and deforestation issues.

7. Habitat Process

- Professor Michael Cohen, Director, New School International Affairs Program

He stated that although climate change is an issue that can connect cities to the globe, since 1976, we have failed to make urban issue a national issue. We defined the housing problem as the search for low-cost housing technologies, but we did not establish its relationship with the whole nation. Therefore, for HABITAT III we have to take a political stance and say that local solutions are not enough in achieving sustainability. Climate change is a major issue where we understand that cities are part of a global system. Even today this problem does not seem to be solved. Absence of the “city” as a category in the recent stimulus plan is an evidence for this. Therefore, although local design solutions are still important, these solutions should be integrated at the national scale. There is a lack of political mobilization around urban issues. Proposed the concept of Habitat 3.0 (followed by 3.1, etc) as a beginning step in a continuous dialogue between different stakeholders at the national scale.

8. Aging Populations

- Diane Davis, President, International Council for Caring Communities (ICCC)

People are living longer due to improved conditions; aging is an emerging global issue to be addressed a demographic Age quake.

The next round of discussions engaged the Ambassadors and participants

Denmark

Sees a similar format as today as applicable for the Rio+20 processes. He added that urban regions should also be seen as part of the environment, like oceans or land.

Mexico

Expressed need for inclusive planning and raised concerns about moving slum dwellers to places that would put them in a disadvantaged position.

Kenya

Kenya has taken the step of guaranteeing housing for all its citizens. Habitat III could consider the same goal. He also pointed out that the agenda items of a possible Habitat 3 should be well discussed with NGOs.

Morocco

Cited problem of budgetary limitations for disaster relief and also underlined the disconnect between different institutions dealing with disaster relief.

Spain

Need to define the role of new actors and to engage citizens; sees cities as drivers of change and opportunity

St Lucia

Focus on megacities has forgotten the smaller island states that are most vulnerable to climate change. To prevent small islands and other small communities from disasters, scale of solutions and technologies should be adjusted. For example, small scale waste management systems or sewage systems should be developed for communities of 2000-5000 people.

Nepal

Need capacity to successfully utilize information, with need to strengthen local organizations

Bart Harvey

In preparation for Habitat III, sees a simultaneous process that can lead to recommendations

Lance Brown

Stressed the need to communicate and share outcomes from similar events addressing climate change and sustainable urbanization around the world

Ana Marie Argilagos and Neal Peirce

Supported open competitions of sustainable ideas, such as the Solar Decathlon sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Energy, that can be accessible to everyone – this concept can be applied to preparations for Habitat III

Recent College Grad

Found lack of data for academic projects on sustainable cities

Laurie Kerr

If we want change, we need data and information to determine what we need to do before disasters strike. Buildings in our society are highly regulated and data should be available.

Cecelia Martinez

While pointing out that environment is not something that is purely clean, she observed the environment today is a combination nature and man-made. Therefore, if we don't add sustainability into the urban scale, we miss what the environment is related to.

She reminded everyone let the public do public, private do private, noting the need for government role in providing critical infrastructure required for a sustainable planning

David Jordan

Visualized advances in technology as a flowing river with continuous change

Project for Public Spaces

Community projects engage people in sustainable planning and also we should build cities better than they were before the disasters.

Other comment

Emphasis on the importance of youth in future planning– reference to the Secretary General's message

Summary

James McCullar, FAIA, Co-Chair of the Consortium for Sustainable Urbanization

Summarized the discussions

Closing Remarks

Cecelia Martinez, Director of UN-HABITAT New York Office

Made closing remarks and thanked the participants