REGIONAL MEETING
EUROPE
PRAGUE 16-18 MARCH 2016

PRAGUE DECLARATION FOR HABITAT III EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING

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HABITAT III EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING
Prague Declaration for Habitat III

"European Habitat" - Prague 16-18 March 2016

We, the National Government delegations from the Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region, from now on called "the region", as well as relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, men, women, children, youth and other participants of the Habitat III Regional Meeting European Habitat held in Prague on 16-18 March, 2016.

We recall the outcomes of "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030", the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which provides a focus on cities through Goal 11 and other targets across the whole agenda as well as the "Paris Agreement".

We acknowledge also regional specific agreed charters and strategies like, among others, "The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing" and the "Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020".

We met to discuss the challenges and opportunities of providing access to adequate and affordable housing for all in liveable cities and sustainable urban development ahead of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III);
We debated priorities for the New Urban Agenda and policy recommendations to provide official input to the Habitat III preparatory process.
We recall Resolution of GA A/70/210 "Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)".

We, the participants of the "European Habitat" Regional Meeting, express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Czech Republic for generously hosting the meeting and for its excellent organization. Our gratitude also goes to the City of Prague and its people for the warm hospitality accorded to all participants of the meeting.

1. We note the importance of promoting:

    i. **Innovative and productive cities.** Increasing attractiveness and liveability of cities with a focus on innovation and adequate and affordable housing, ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment as well as taking into consideration youth and gender perspectives. Job creation should be promoted through entrepreneurial-friendly conditions, while respecting the environment;
    ii. **Green, compact, resource efficient and resilient cities.** Green and better integrated with nature, inclusive, liveable, compact and resilient cities are a priority in policies at all levels of the government and in regional cooperation, especially with regard to members of vulnerable groups, marginalized communities and people with special needs.

Increasing resource efficiency on energy, water, waste, land use and food as well as mitigating greenhouse gases emission, improving air quality and taking care of wastewater in cities together with making cities resilient to climate change and other challenges, such as to flood, drought, heat waves, natural and man-made hazards, as well as ensuring transition towards safe and sustainable urban mobility, clean and accessible urban transport for all;

iii. **Inclusive and safe cities.** To address the causes of discrimination and inequalities, with a particular focus on human rights in cities on the basis of gender equality and as a result of other forms of exclusion and unequal power relations owing to race, ethnicity, culture, caste, class, age, ability or disability, sexual orientation, religion. This should include the progressive realization of the rights to an adequate standard of living for all, including to adequate and affordable housing in accordance with states' obligations;

iv. **Good urban governance.** Improving urban governance by establishing and strengthening local democracy, participatory and multilevel governance, building the capacity of local authorities and all civil society actors, implementing holistic and integrated strategies for sustainable urban development. Sustainable, inclusive and effective urban planning and management, is a vehicle towards improved quality of life of all people. This should take into consideration urban identity and local culture. Protecting cities' character and valuing their history and traditions, in order to foster social cohesion and civic values and transmit heritage to the future generations.Women's empowerment and women's full and equal participation in the economy are vital to achieve sustainable development and significantly enhance economic growth and productivity.

We stress that:

(a) There is a need to plan and manage urban areas through the cooperation of national governments with regional and local authorities and communities within established coordination mechanisms. This should take into account the functional urban areas and metropolitan areas, as well as opportunities within the territories building on urban/rural linkages;

(b) Cities need to be enabled and empowered in order to be key actors in the implementation of sustainable urban development based on the principles of sustainable development. To this end, local authorities, particularly through their local government associations. Citizens should be involved and consulted at all stages of the policy cycle, from planning to implementation, in a well-designed system of multi-level governance.

(c) There is also a need to assure compliance to legal requirements by independent institutions acting in land governance, land registration; ensuring security of tenure, a transparent and efficient land use, property registration, and sound financial system as fundamental bases for sustainable, resilient and affordable housing, and urban development;

(d) International cooperation and exchanges between national, regional and local authorities can promote sustainable economic development, social and environmental protection;

(e) Integrated and place-based support measures should be facilitated to enable cities and their surroundings to make the most of their potentials and address specific challenges especially on urban economies;

(f) Social cohesion, better access to services (greening areas, public transport, primary health, education and culture), urban safety;

(g) Long term and non-speculative, risk informed investments in housing and urban development can stimulate employment in cities;

(h) Resource efficiency and promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns are critical elements for cities to manage growth, increase resource productivity, and decouple economic growth from increased resource use and its environmental impact;
(i) Efforts to protect and safeguard the cultural and natural heritage contribute to the development of sustainable cities and communities;
(j) We consider affordability in cities a key factor in the quality of human life. It is also a major feature of liveable cities and promotes economic development and job creation. Planned urban development that minimizes environmental impact can promote economic, social and environmental sustainability and prevent urban sprawl;
(k) Risk informed urban development is also a means to increase resilience of cities against both natural and man-made hazards and related environmental, technological and biological risks, as well as their cascade effects.

Challenges to housing and sustainable urban development in the region

2. Our countries face multiple challenges:

Urban poverty: Lack of affordable, adequate, accessible, habitable, resilient housing and homelessness are a major problem. In some cities, lack of public spaces, safe and accessible transport and basic public facilities and services such as affordable energy provision for all, deprives the residents of amenities and a standard of living which should be available to all. Inadequate access to any of the basic services; water, sanitation, shelter, household energy, food security, healthcare, education and personal security, adversely affects the health of the population and inhibits economic growth.
The growing of informal and / or substandard housing is becoming a reality, as those who cannot get into the housing market find themselves relegated to living in slums with poor infrastructure and inadequate basic services. . In deprived urban areas, the physical and economic regeneration activities require coherent and multi-dimensional approaches particularly relevant for the marginalized communities and individuals, whose effective integration requires employment, education, healthcare, housing and social integration. For housing investments envisaged within segregated neighbourhoods, they should aim at tackling the spatial and social isolation of the marginalised community, and interventions should follow the principles of non-segregation and desegregation. The increasing duality of the labour markets changes the patterns of employment, favouring those with more added value to the economy over the traditional, low value-adding jobs. This significantly contributes to an increase in social and spatial inequalities. Growing inequalities and the lack of affordable and accessible housing for low and medium income strata may lead to urban sprawl, while the lack of public spaces and transport deprives residents of amenities and adequatestandard of living, which should be accesible to all.

Demographic changes: Important demographic changes such as ageing and migration, which have taken place in the last decades, need to be addressed. The ageing population has become a significant issue, with the majority of housing being ill-equipped to cater to this increasing group of population. Poor housing conditions have a direct effect on the physical and mental health of the population. This justifies the need to provide adequate and healthy housing.
The growing proportion of the ageing population increase the costs of health care and the burden on the welfare systems, moreover majority of housing and public urban spaces are not well adapted to the ageing population as well as to the increasing urban youth population in some other member states which poses challenges on adequate and affordable housing and

infrastructure. Migration has led to increased diversity in many cities, a process that boosts social innovation but brings along challenges for social cohesion that require adequate policy responses.

Climate change and disaster risk: There is a strong relation between climate change, disaster risk mitigation and spatial planning, public transport, mobility and housing. Member States in cooperation with local and regional governments, should seek to mitigate and adapt to climate change reducing GHG emissions through city-based actions. This can include measures such as ensuring that buildings are energy-efficient and the share of renewables is increased. Housing stock, buildings and vital infrastructure like hospitals, schools, work places, as well as public transport facilities, should be made low-carbon, and resilient to both natural and man-made hazards and related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks, as well as their cascade effects on, infrastructure, economic assets and livelihoods. Cities should aim at preventing water-related disasters through the establishment of emergency plans and awareness-raising. Sustainable food systems are fundamental to safe, inclusive and resilient communities, while urban areas face high levels of food waste, which is expected to rise as urbanization continues.

Urban growth and urban sprawl: If not controlled, urban growth can lead to urban sprawl. Member states should prevent negative impact on the environment through, strategic planning of human settlements in a polycentric and balanced territorial development with efficient and safe multi-modal transport systems.
In preventing urban sprawl, we must consider also the cost of urban densification using the existing urban structure, and preserving the habitability of the urban environment.

Coordination in urban development: Planning strategies and tools need to be implemented towards more balanced public and private relations. Cooperation in urban planning and management between different levels of governments, communities, local NGOs and the private sector should be encouraged. This entails enacting measures at national, regional and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each scale of governance, thereby guaranteeing the most effective results. This includes the need for all key stakeholders and inhabitants to participate in the decision-making process related to urban planning, as they would be affected by developments in housing.

Urban regeneration: Overestimation of technical aspects of building construction and urban planning (including green technologies) can compromise social sustainability and cultural adequacy of housing solutions as well as the preservation of the city's tangible and intangible cultural heritage which carry the memory and identity of its inhabitants over generations. A balanced approach to urban regeneration should consider social cohesion and the urban environment, in this regard, local planning at neighbourhood level is essential to create vibrant communities and liveable cities. The approach should provide public spaces as a key element affecting the quality of life and identity of the inhabitants of a city.

Relevant use of technology: Progress in technologies and the availability of data are rapidly changing our life and the way we organize it. Urban planners should adopt relevant technological innovations, which allow more effective use of available data. This requires educating and building the capacity of urban managers, decision-makers and inhabitants. Open and disaggregated data is a critical component in transparent and effective governance and also in the provision of efficient environmental and energy services in urban settings. Every effort must be made to keep shared

data accessible to the public, while protecting the privacy of individuals. Cities should consider simple, interoperable, and comparable data markers and standards for data collection. Data should also be transparent and openly accessible to be exploited as a tool to increase the ownership and engagement of people. Technological and digital divide in urban planning and management has to be addressed.

Key directions from Prague to Quito

3. We should address the above challenges through an integrated approach to sustainable urban development, setting out effective actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climate, demographic, social and cultural challenges affecting urban areas.
   Cities should be "people-centred" and enhance conditions for wellbeing, development, and realization of human rights of all inhabitants. In particular by:

Innovative and productive cities

(a) We support cities strengthening their endogenous potential for innovation, including social innovation and job creation through ensuring an enabling business environment, transparent and predictable local policies and regulations on land security. Infrastructure, adequate and affordable housing and markets supporting local economic development should be in place, as well as employment and decent work for all, including young populations, while respecting the environment and strengthening equity and social integration. Enhancing economic growth across socio-economic sectors should go hand in hand with measures to improve urban resilience, including the transition towards the circular and green economy. It should stimulate rural-urban production, supply chains and the cities' food security, among others to promote a sustainable urban metabolism that will reduce urban inequalities and urban-rural tensions;

Green, compact, resource efficient and resilient cities

(b) We support cities to make best use of natural resources including through spatial planning, and to focus on resource-efficiency of energy, water, raw materials like concrete, metals minerals and land, including through effective land management, in order to prevent urban sprawl and strengthen the “multiple use of space” principle. We also support climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and cities' resilience to floods, heat waves and natural and man-made hazards. Urbanizing deltas in this respect are facing extreme and specific tensions because of the combination of socio-economic and natural/ environmental dynamics. We encourage the use of green and blue infrastructures as well as nature-based solutions, in addition to hard preventive infrastructure and spatial planning, as a tool to prevent disasters, in particular water-related ones, from having a big impact;

Inclusive and safe cities

(c) We encourage addressing urban poverty and exclusion by addressing, reducing and preventing the root causes and effects of inequalities and conflict through inclusive decision-making, equal access to affordable housing, transparent and efficient delivery of basic services including water and sanitation, mobility and public and green spaces, safeguarding tenure security. The New Urban Agenda should also aim at creating dialogue and conflict mediation between and within communities, tackling all forms of discrimination against women and children, and addressing the specific needs of members of vulnerable groups, including refugees and other groups of migrants. Specific attention should be given to

women's empowerment, inter-cultural and inter-generational dialogue. Cities are places where disparities and inequalities are concentrated and they are also places where different cultures may co-exist, where ethnic diversity may become a source of innovation and renewal, and where social mobility is possible;

(d) Providing accessible, safe, inclusive and quality public space, and safe transportation to foster urban equity, social cohesion and better quality of life, with particular attention to the needs of men, women, children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities;

(e) Promoting the improvement of access to basic services allowing sustainable growth and job creation, with particular attention to the empowerment of women and better gender equality;

Good urban governance

(f) We support the elaboration of country-specific and evidence based policy guidance and recommendations on challenges related to housing, urban development and land management through regional and thematic studies;

(g) Using research and innovation, developing in-depth assessments and reports to increase the knowledge and availability of data based on country specificity, fostering open access to data and knowledge, leading to harmonizing definitions, methodologies, indicators and standards both at the regional and international level, and ensure effective monitoring;

(h) Promoting dialogue between all level of governance and relevant stakeholders, creating, when applicable, and supporting existing local, national, regional and trans-national networks, platforms and institutions, facilitating the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices including city-to-city cooperation;

(i) Promoting national urban policies as appropriate, which are conducive to sustainable urban development and foster territorial cohesion and their translation to localised urban legislation and regulations, respecting, where appropriate, the principle of subsidiarity;

(j) Strengthening the use of spatial planning and design of urban extensions, infill and regeneration ensuring a bottom-up and multilevel governance as well as integrated approaches involving all stakeholders and the inhabitants; Cooperative mechanisms of spatial planning and steering in metropolitan areas beyond administrative boundaries should be strengthened and supported by integrated spatial strategies to ensure a balanced territorial development;

(k) Stressing that approaches in order to be effective, may have to be locality-specific and therefore varied as the diversity of the countries, economies, societies and cultures in the region. Especially promoting the design and implementation of national urban policies according to a "place-based" approach;

(l) Supporting and building capacity of local authorities, a key element for sustainable development of urban areas. This could be done by promoting decentralised cooperation among local authorities, empowering all concerned levels of governance to tackle social, economic, environmental and demographic urban development challenges in an integrated manner; establish legislative frameworks; and consolidate shared knowledge bases;

(m) Focusing on land management and land access as a pre-requisite for sustainable urban development, as well as ensuring sustainable financing models that guarantee the public benefit resulting from the increases in land values and the mobilization of urban development capital gains in favour of land use planning;

(n) Building accountability and regular monitoring of the coherent implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals with a special focus on goal 11 and other targets across the Agenda, using the relevant indicators defined. This should include

regionally specific agreements and strategies on data collection and analyses. . Data should be gathered using common international standards to ensure it is compatible between Member States. It should, as much as possible, be publicly available to support policy-making, research and economic development. Lastly, global and regional data repositories should be further developed to support the policy-making process;

(o) Supporting sound municipal finances so that cities can provide needs-oriented services to their inhabitants. This includes facilitating local authorities enhanced access to financial resources, including strengthening own source revenues by establishing and improving revenue generation and collection systems at sub-national level, improving access to national financial allocations, but also by facilitating access to capital markets and attracting domestic and foreign direct investment;

(p) A modern legislation and appropriate monitoring institutions are crucial for a fair competition in the market to avoid land and housing markets speculations.

(q) Cities need to be enabled, entitled and empowered in order to act on the principles of sustainable development and to be key actors in the implementation of sustainable urban development. To this end, local authorities, particularly through their representative local government associations, and citizens should be involved and consulted at all stages of the policy cycle, from planning to implementation, in a well-designed system of multi-level governance.