HABITAT III EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING

**DRAFT PRAGUE DECLARATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)**

16–18 MARCH 2016

This document has not been proofread.

HABITAT III EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING

**PRAGUE DECLARATION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)**

16–18 MARCH 2016

1. We, the National Government delegations from the Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), as well as relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, women, children, youth and other participants of the "European Habitat" Regional Meeting in Prague on 16-18 March, 2016
   - met to discuss the challenges and opportunities of housing in liveable cities and urbanization ahead of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development - Habitat III;
   - debated priorities for the "New Urban Agenda" and policy recommendations: and
   - agreed on this Declaration as an official input to the Habitat III preparatory process.

2. 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.

Introduction

3. We note the importance of promoting:
   i. **Innovative and productive cities**. Increasing attractiveness of cities with a focus on innovation, inclusiveness, improvement of youth and gender perspectives, and job creation, through entrepreneurial-friendly conditions, while respecting the environment;
   ii. **Green and compact and resilient cities**. Increasing resource efficiency (on energy, water, waste, land use). Improving air quality and taking care of wastewater in cities together with making cities resilient to flood, heat waves and natural hazards, as well as ensuring transition towards sustainable urban mobility, clean urban transport and improved access to transport services for all;

iii. **Inclusive cities**. Addressing the multiple aspects of gender and youth issues, urban poverty and exclusion;

iv. **Good urban governance**. Improving urban governance by supporting and building the capacity of local authorities, a key element identified for establishing and strengthening systems and practices of good governance.

4. We stress that:
   (a) Sustainable and integrated urban development and its management are crucial to the safety and quality of life of our people;
   (b) Green, inclusive, habitable, compact and resilient cities are a priority in policies at all levels of the government and in regional cooperation, especially with regard to vulnerable groups, marginalized communities and people with special needs;
   (c) Involvement of cities and people in urban development, and raising capacities of cities to address urban development challenges are important;
   (d) There is a need, through the regular cooperation of national governments with local authorities and communities within established intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, to plan and manage urban areas within administrative borders of cities and towns, taking into account the functional urban area and/or metropolitan vision, and those territories which provide opportunities or risks and building on urban/rural linkages. There is also a need to assure compliance to legal requirements of independent institutions acting in land governance and land registration;
   (e) Integrated and place-based support measures should be facilitated to enable cities and their territory to make the most of their potentials and address specific challenges especially on urban economies;
   (f) Social cohesion, better access to services (green areas, public transport, primary health, education and culture), urban safety and ensuring access of vulnerable groups of people to affordable social housing are prerequisites for the quality of living conditions in cities;
   (g) Transparent and efficient land use, property registration, and sound financial system are fundamental bases for sustainable, resilient and affordable housing, and urban development;
   (h) Investments in housing and urban development stimulate employment in cities.

5. We urge governments at all levels and relevant stakeholders to promote the implementation of the "Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030"[1], the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the "Climate Change Agreement", "The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing"[2], the "UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy"[3] and the "Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020"[4].

6. We recognize the importance to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development, assess accomplishments, address poverty, and identify and address new and emerging challenges. The Habitat III Conference will result in a concise, focused,

---

[1] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

[2] http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/UNECE_Charter_EN.pdf

[3] http://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/housing-slum-upgrading/

[4] http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/sessions/docs2013/draft.strategy.post.pdf

forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document. It will be the first UN global conference after the adoption of the "Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030" and the new "Climate Change Agreement". The "New Urban Agenda" will be an opportunity for implementation of these agreements.

7. 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)".

8. We consider housing as a key factor in the quality of human life. It is also a major feature of liveable cities. Planned urban development constructed and used in a way that minimizes environmental impact, can promote economic, social and environmental sustainability and prevent urban sprawl. Planned urban development is also a means to increase resiliency of cities against natural and man-made disasters, such as flooding. Therefore, governments at all levels need to debate on housing and urban development policies with emphasis on engaged and negotiated civic involvement, social inclusiveness, public health, transparency, and concern for ethical processes.

Challenges to housing and urban development in the region

9. Our countries face multiple challenges:

   (a) **Urban poverty**: Lack of affordable, accessible, habitable and resilient housing is becoming a major problem for individuals who have limited access to low cost housing. In some cities, lack of public spaces, transport, and access to basic public facilities and services deprives the residents of amenities and a standard of living which should be available to all. The re-emergence of informal housing is anticipated, as those who cannot get into the housing market find themselves relegated to living in slums with poor infrastructure and insufficient sewage systems, thus affecting the health of the population. In deprived urban areas, the physical and economic regeneration activities require coherent and multi-dimensional approaches. This approach is particularly relevant for the marginalized communities, whose effective integration requires investments in employment, education, healthcare, housing and social integration. Regarding housing interventions, local integrated housing approaches should be facilitated with special attention to public utility and social service infrastructures. 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.

   (b) **Demographic changes**: Important demographic changes such as ageing and migration, which have taken place in the last century, 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. Migration has led to increased diversity in many cities, a process that boosts social innovation but brings along challenges for social cohesion. Corresponding policies need to be developed to address this situation.

   (c) **Climate change and disaster risk**: There is a strong relation between climate change and spatial planning, (public) transport and mobility, and housing: where

people live and work influences climate change. The housing sector contributes to the climate change problem. Member States can seek to adapt and mitigate its negative environmental impacts. This can include measures such as ensuring that homes are energy-efficient is one measure to reduce overall CO2 emissions. Focus should also be placed on more efficient and environmentally friendly public transport systems and infrastructure systems of wastewater, solid waste and water sanitation. Public housing stock, buildings and vital infrastructure like hospitals, schools, work places, as well as technical infrastructure and public transport facilities, should be made resilient to natural and man-made disasters and to the impacts of climate change to natural disasters, which can cause heavy damage to the housing stock, infrastructure, economic assets and livelihoods. Since most of climate change impact is channelled through water, cities should aim at preventing water-related disasters from happening combined with the establishment of emergency plans and awareness-raising.

(d) **Urban growth and urban sprawl**: While urban growth is needed, it can lead to urban sprawl if not controlled. This could bring a negative impact on the environment and to prevent this, member States should promote strategic planning of human settlements. Compact urban forms should be promoted together with efficient public transport systems and secured access to local services and jobs. Advanced planning systems need to be adopted to secure positive outcomes of the compact city concept and to avoid possible risks. In preventing urban sprawl, we must consider not only the associated cost but also the cost of urban densification using the existing urban structure, and the habitability of the urban environment.

(e) **Weakened coordination in urban development**: In the UNECE region, an erosion of the public sphere has been observed, leaving more tasks to the private sector. Simultaneously, new housing forms and types have emerged together with different development strategies. Thus, new planning strategies and tools need to be implemented to balance this situation. Cooperation in urban planning and management between different levels of governments and local NGOs should be encouraged. This entails enacting measures at national 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 planning, as they would be affected by developments in housing. In order to raise sufficient funds and increase economic growth, Public, Private, People's Partnerships (PPPPs) should be encouraged to guarantee the quality and quantity of public space and accessibility to the city. This will allow for the public and private sectors to work together, benefiting both parties.

(f) **Urban renewal**: Overestimation of technical aspects of building construction and urban planning (including green technologies) can compromise social sustainability and cultural adequacy of housing solutions. A balanced approach should consider social cohesion and clear organization of the urban environment. The approach should provide public spaces - a key element affecting quality of life and identity of the inhabitants of a city. In the process of urban renewal, local planning at neighbourhood level is essential to create vibrant communities and habitable cities.

(g) **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 wil also allow use more effectively available data. This requires educating and building the capacity of urban managers, decision-makers and citizens. The concern on security of open

data also needs to be addressed. Countries should have harmonized data and standards for data collection. Countries with transition economies will require even more technical assistance to overcome the technological and digital divide in urban planning and management.

(h) Urban development and housing are significant contributors to climate change and pollution, as cities consume almost 80% of energy; produce 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions; and more than 90% of the population in the European region are exposed to levels of outdoor fine particulate matter exceeding the annual air quality guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO).

(i) The growing proportion of the ageing population and various forms of migration increase the costs of health care and the burden on the welfare systems, as majority of housing and public urban spaces are not well adapted to the ageing of the population. Adaptation of cities to ageing will further increase challenges of integration in human settlements.

(j) The increasing duality of the labour markets changes the patterns of employment, favouring those with more added value to the economy over traditional, low value-adding jobs. This significantly contributes to increase of social inequalities in cities by limiting affordability of better urban areas to the wealthiest strata of the population.

(k) While urban growth is needed, lack of affordability leads to urban sprawl, growing inequalities and proliferation of gated communities; lack of affordable and accessible housing is becoming a major problem for citizens with limited access to low cost housing; and lack of public spaces and transport deprives the residents of amenities and a standard of living, which should be available to all.

Key directions to address the challenges

10. We shall address the above challenges, in particular by:

(a) Elaborating country-specific policy guidance and recommendations on challenges related to housing, urban development and land management through regional and thematic studies;

(b) Developing in-depth assessments and flagship reports, including a series of Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management;

(c) Harmonizing methodologies and definitions in the area of housing and land management at the regional and international levels, and supporting the development of common terms, language definitions and standards;

(d) Promoting dialogue between governments and relevant stakeholders using existing platforms, such as United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, the European Commission, the European Union housing focal points, and the Intergovernmental Council for Cooperation in Construction of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), to facilitate the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices;

(e) Promoting national urban policies conducive to balanced urbanisation and their translation to localised urban legislation and regulations; promoting strategic planning of human settlements; enacting measures at national and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each scale of governance; thereby guaranteeing the most effective results;

(f) Strengthening use of spatial planning and design of urban extensions, ensuring participation in planning by all key stakeholders and the inhabitants;

(g) Introducing effective financial systems at the municipal level, ensuring that local governments of the cities can implement the plans elaborated and support equitable and sustainable development of the human settlements;

(h) Stressing that approaches in order to be effective, will have to be locality-specific and therefore varied as the diversity of the countries, economies, societies and cultures in the UNECE region;

(i) Promoting innovative and productive cities: to increase their attractiveness with a focus on innovation, inclusiveness, improvement of youth perspectives and job creation through entrepreneurial-friendly environments;

(j) Promoting green and compact and resilient cities: by increasing urban resource efficiency;

(k) Promoting inclusive cities: addressing the multiple aspects of urban poverty and exclusion. 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;

(l) Promoting the improvement of access to basic services allowing sustainable growth and job creation. The empowerment of women and better gender equality will be priorities of the EU external cooperation urban development policy;

(m) Promoting good urban governance: supporting and building capacity of local authorities, a key element for sustainable development of urban areas. This could be done by empowering all concerned levels of the government to: tackle social, economic, environmental and demographic urban development challenges in an integrated manner; establish legislative frameworks; and consolidate shared knowledge bases;

(n) Focusing on sustainable urban planning and design, where necessary, as well as capacity building and institutional support to strengthen and enhance decentralisation processes;

(o) Creating regional networks of governments and experts: organizing workshops and study trips; creating synergies using existing platforms and involving relevant UN and EU programmes, agencies and bodies and other stakeholders, to ensure consistency and complementarity and allow effective collaboration on housing and land related issues;

(p) Developing and implementing capacity-building programmes for participatory, integrated and sustainable, resilient and affordable human settlement planning for all relevant stakeholders. This can be achieved through high-quality training courses, study trips, advisory services and publications;

(q) Regular monitoring of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals and other targets, including those in the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region 2014-2020, and the UNECE/International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Smart Sustainable City Indicators, through the regular collection and analysis of data, etc. 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.