

Habitat III informal consultations – Mr. Maurice van Beers, head of Delegation, Kingdom of the Netherlands statement on urban ecology and resilience (policy unit 8), 27 April 2016

Dear chair, dear delegates,

Thank you for the presentation and the good work of all the experts of the policy unit. We support the statement and the four key strings mentioned by the EU on Monday being 1. inclusive and safe, 2. green and resilient, 3. prosperous and innovative and 4. well governed cities. Elaborating on these priorities and adding and complementing the analysis and conclusions of the paper presented we would like to share three additional points:

- Water in the centre of urban resilience
- The importance of a preventive risk based approach
- A plea for taking urbanizing deltas into account

There will be a full statement on the conference website.

Water at the centre of urban resilience

First of all we underline that water is key in achieving sustainably developed, resilient and livable cities. It is a common denominator of many sectors in urban areas. Water is not only a resource and a threat, it has many other functions. In relation to for example food, waste, energy, trade, recreation, transport of goods and people, habitat and biodiversity. It is a connector between the city and its hinterland as well as across sectors. When well managed, it can help in the development of these sectors and hence the sustainable development of the urban area.

It is therefore important that in the New Urban Agenda urban water management should be integrated, taking into account:

- Transboundary aspects: urban governance should take into account rural-urban relationships as well as the water basin in which the city is located, as water connects the cities with their hinterland.
- The need for vertical (across governments) and horizontal (with other sectors) integration.
- The various risks of water related to cities:
 - flooding (due to extreme weather events, sea level rise)
 - drought and/or heat stress (affecting food availability, energy supply and livability)
 - water supply (for drinking water) and sanitation
 - water quality (related to drinking water supply and public health)

The importance of a preventive approach

Secondly, In line with the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction a **preventive approach** in relation with disasters, including water-related ones, based on a risk-based approach should be key in the New Urban Agenda. Preventive action is the smart thing to do. The cost of inaction is high, as every dollar invested in preventive measures saves 7 dollars in loss and damage due to disasters. This is even more true for cities due to the concentration of people and assets.

Tools to achieve a preventive approach should be included in the New Urban Agenda, like:

- Hard infrastructure: both nature-based solutions (including green-blue corridors) and grey climate resilient infrastructures.
- Planning: protecting vital infrastructures such as hospitals and escape routes; multi-functional use of space; planning regulation on where and how to build

- Emergency responses and awareness raising in relation to risks as well as possible actions to deal with them.

To make our cities really resilient it is important to:

- Recognize that urban service infrastructure (water, energy, transport, etc.) needs to be climate-resilient in order to secure the sustainable, safe and inclusive delivery of these services
- Recognize that climate-resilience is also needed for other urban infrastructure, such as protection against flooding and sewerage systems for drainage of excess rainfall water. It is essential and hence basic infrastructure.
- Recognize that basic services can only be delivered without interruption if they are well-protected.

A plea for taking urbanizing deltas into account

We recall that urbanizing deltas - we just heard the example of Bangladesh and Dakha - are the most challenging regions of the world, considering their large concentrations of population, their role in the world's ecosystems and their significance to the world's economy. Delta cities are drivers for economic development and historically ideal places for urban settlements, because of their positions on the crossroads of land, rivers, sea and international trade and because of the fertility of alluvial plains and coastal waters.

At the same time we underline that urbanization and densification of urban land use have resulted in the disappearance of natural land-water transitions, which are important as buffers in times of high water levels and droughts. This further increases the vulnerability of urbanized deltas to climate change impacts and flood risk, with increasing numbers of victims as a result, and subsequent economic and ecological losses. For this reason in particular we call for the inclusion of urbanizing deltas in the New Urban Agenda, containing the following action points;

- Work on restoring the natural resilience and adaptability of deltas and adding the catchment area to the scale of the future cities strengthening urban rural linkages.
- Implement a preventive, inclusive, integrated and gender responsive approach, combining interventions concerning prevention, spatial adaptation and disaster management taking into account nature based solutions, green-blue and climate resilient infrastructure.
- Promote the transition towards a circular economy to ensure a sustainable urban metabolism to support delta cities in making the best use of natural resources promoting sustainable consumption and production respecting the planetary boundaries.
- Promote multi-stakeholder and multilevel governance arrangements with smart financial mechanisms and arrangements, knowledge exchange and capacity building for local delta cities and the promotion of innovative ways to increase civic participation in decision-making processes, in particular of women and representatives of vulnerable groups..

Finally, we would like to invite you for the Delta Coalition Conference the 9 & 10 May, 2016, Rotterdam, The Netherlands which will have a specific focus on sustainable urban deltas.

Thank you