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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

**Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting Preparatory
to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements
(Habitat II)**

Santiago, Chile, 13-17 November 1995



**DRAFT REPORT OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN REGIONAL MEETING
PREPARATORY TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)**



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A. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place, date and purpose

1. The Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting took place at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) from 13 to 17 November 1995 and served as the meeting preparatory to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to be held in Istanbul from 3 to 14 June 1996.
2. The mandate for the meeting derives from General Assembly resolution 47/180 of 22 December 1992, in which the Assembly recommends "that regional and subregional preparatory meetings should be held in conjunction with meetings of subregional and regional intergovernmental bodies, wherever possible".
3. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate and examine systematically the trends in human settlements in the region, looking at urbanization tendencies, the housing situation in Latin American and Caribbean countries and the changes that have come about over the past few decades in both the perception of the problems and the solutions proposed.

Attendance

4. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the following States members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.

5. A representative of Aruba, an associate member of the Commission, also attended the Meeting.
6. A representative of Turkey, a State Member of the United Nations which is not a member of the Commission, attended the Meeting as a specially invited guest.
7. The Meeting was also attended by representatives of the following United Nations bodies: United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
8. The following United Nations specialized agencies were represented: International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Health Organization-Pan American Health Organization (WHO-PAHO), World Bank-International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).
9. The Meeting was also attended by representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations: Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Organization of American States (OAS).
10. The following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council were also represented: Category I: United Towns Organization (UTO). Category II: Union of Ibero-American Capitals (UCCI) and Inter-American Housing Union (UNIAPRAVI). Roster: International Association for Sports and Leisure Facilities, World Association of the Major Metropolis (Metropolis) and Habitat International Coalition (HIC).
11. Other non-governmental organizations were represented, as follows: Asociación "Sociedad y Territorio para Iberoamérica", Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales (CEUR), Centro de Investigaciones y Proyectos Urbanos y Regionales (CIPUR), Centro Operacional de Vivienda y Poblamiento (COPEVI), Federación Nacional de Organizaciones de Vivienda Popular (FEDEVIVIENDA), Foro Urbano-Iniciativa Ciudadana Hábitat II, Fundación Educativa, Medio

Ambiente, Desarrollo y Salud (FEMADS), Isis International Women's Information and Communication Service, PRODECO and Servicio en Promoción Humana (SERVIPROH).

12. Representatives of the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Global Parliamentarians on Habitat, Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), Madrid Urban Architecture Office, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (Chile), Montevideo City Council, Municipality of Santiago, Municipality of São Paulo, Sucre Municipal Council, Regional Ministerial Secretariat of Housing (Chile), Rio de Janeiro City Prefecture and Urban Management Programme, attended as observers.

Election of officers

13. The Conference elected the following officers:

<u>Chairperson:</u>	Chile
<u>Vice-Chairpersons:</u>	Colombia
	Jamaica
	Uruguay
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Guatemala

Agenda

14. At its first meeting the Conference adopted the following agenda:

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda
2. Consideration of developments relating to human settlements since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) and Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Vancouver, 1976) within the context of economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean

3. Diagnosis and analysis of the current situation
 - 3.1 Demographic and geographic trends in relation to regional social and economic development
 - 3.2 Current policies on human settlements in Latin America and the Caribbean
 - 3.3 Housing policies in the region
4. Projections of trends in the area of human settlements in the region based on the diagnostic data
5. Proposals and recommendations from Latin America and the Caribbean for the global plan of action
6. Other matters.

Organization of work

15. The Meeting was divided into two stages: one technical and the other ministerial. During the technical stage, an open-ended drafting group chaired by the Rapporteur also met. The drafting group was entrusted with preparing the draft regional plan of action on human settlements, which was subsequently considered in the plenary meeting.

Opening of the technical stage

16. After greeting the participants in the technical stage and thanking them for their attendance, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC said that the Meeting was very much in the current working mode of the United Nations, which had organized a series of world conferences to raise awareness of the major problems standing in the way of development and to bring together ideas on these issues. After undertaking a close examination of the situation and the viewpoints of the countries of the region, the meeting participants would have before them the important task of defining a joint position. In that regard, the Executive Secretary considered it very positive that representatives from a variety of sectors

were present to enrich the debate on the issue of human settlements and hence to make possible a truly regional contribution to Habitat II.

17. The representative from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) said that the meeting had been made possible through the initiative of the countries and the awareness of the private sector and non-governmental and community organizations. After mentioning other parallel preparatory meetings, such as the Caribbean Subregional Meeting that had taken place in Bridgetown, Barbados, in September 1995, he stressed that the present meeting offered an opportunity to analyze the changes that had come about over the past 20 years, including a change in the negative perception of the phenomenon of urbanization, which was now seen as a potential engine of development and the democratization process. He felt that the real challenge for human settlements would be faced on the urban level and would consist of the need to eliminate social marginalization and to ensure the population access to basic services. In order to meet the challenge, social reform would be required on the national and local levels.

18. The representative of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) stressed the importance which his organization attached at present to the housing and urban development sector in the region. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Bank's investments had been concentrated in rural development, but this situation had been transformed during the 1980s. In his view, the key issues raised in the past 10 years in connection with urbanization had been decentralization of governments, governability, support to local authorities in the participatory process and the organization of civil society. The Bank currently devoted 40% of its resources and 50% of its projects to investment in social sectors, and continued to support the preparatory activities for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). It was also planning to redefine its policies in the urban sector and to adopt a position of support to the regional process of reform in that area.

19. The Chilean Minister of Housing and Urban Development discussed the importance of the urbanization process in Latin America and the Caribbean and pointed out that by the year 2000 80% of the population would be concentrated in the cities and there would be at least five huge metropolitan areas in the region. In order to come up with an adequate solution to the many problems this phenomenon would cause, the countries of the region would have to revitalize the old ideal of regional unity in the hope of achieving major progress through horizontal cooperation, the interchange of experiences and

experts, the identification of successful practices and the presentation of joint proposals to the international community.

Opening of the ministerial stage

20. At the opening meeting of the ministerial stage, statements were made by Mr. Gert Rosenthal, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, and by Mr. Edmundo Hermosilla, Chilean Minister of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, a message was read out from Mr. Wally N'Dow, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

21. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC said that the aim of the meeting was to consider the development of human settlements in Latin America and the Caribbean since Habitat I, bearing in mind the changes that had taken place during the past two decades.

22. To begin with, a clear trend towards the consolidation of urbanization had been seen; this process had not been without problems, chief among which was probably the concentration of poverty in cities. There were also major deficiencies in the region's urban infrastructure which severely limited the capacity of its cities to meet the challenges of competitiveness. Nevertheless, the urbanization process in Latin America and the Caribbean was very far from the calamity that some had predicted the region's future would be. Notwithstanding the problems mentioned, the region's large cities had evolved towards more gradual and functional growth patterns, while adapting to changing circumstances and correcting some of the deficiencies prevalent in the 1970s. Cities were manageable and habitable; furthermore, efficient urban management could turn them into engines of development. Thus, the fact that in the 1990s the Latin American and Caribbean region was one of the most urbanized regions in the world was not an obstacle to economic and social progress, but could even be an advantage.

23. The Executive Secretary said that the plan of action to be adopted should link economic development policies to the use of physical space, and should contribute to realizing the potential of cities to generate innovations and offer better services, faster communications and skilled human resources, which would promote the goal of changing production patterns with social equity that the region's countries were seeking.

24. In his message to the participants in the Meeting, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) said that the Latin American and Caribbean countries showed an understandable interest in obtaining control over their growing urban areas, which had grown rapidly over the past several decades, some into mega-cities that were among the biggest in the world. Within 30 years, the congested cities of the third world would be the home of nearly 4 billion people, and since many of those people would be without jobs they would be the new urban poor. That problem, which did not affect only Latin America and the Caribbean, showed why the United Nations had decided to hold Habitat II. Clearly, urbanization was no longer a local dilemma; it was now an international phenomenon. One of the prime aims of Habitat II, in order to respond to that situation, was to promote collaboration between local communities and the public and private sectors, which would assist central and local governments in their search for new ideas, new forms of cooperation and workable solutions to the problems confronting them.

25. In conclusion, the Secretary-General of the Conference said that he hoped the Meeting would not only reinforce the region's participation in the next session of the Preparatory Committee in New York and at the world conference, but would also contribute to the continuing search for innovative ways of alleviating the suffering of urban communities, bearing in mind that only human solidarity could make cities truly humane.

26. Mr. Edmundo Hermosilla, Chilean Minister of Housing and Urban Development, said that the fundamental purpose of the Meeting was to lend political support to its conclusions and to formulate a common regional position for Habitat II. He referred to two key ideas upon which consensus would have to be built: the characteristics of the urbanization process and the underuse of the region's resource base. The goal of the Meeting was to give priority to the issues of housing and development, and to present to the international community a unified position on the region's needs.

27. He then stressed the need to acknowledge that poverty was one of the most deplorable aspects of the urbanization process, that there was a clear relationship between human settlements and the environment, that the productivity and competitiveness of cities must be achieved within the framework of globalization, and that both local management and policy-implementation tools must be improved and strengthened.

B. SUMMARY OF DEBATES

Technical stage

28. In the technical stage the delegations of Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela took part. The representatives of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Global Parliamentarians on Habitat and the non-governmental organization Habitat International Coalition also spoke.

29. The Chairman of the Chilean Association of Municipalities, speaking at one of the plenary meetings of the technical stage, presented the results and agreements reached at the Meeting of the Network of Latin American Municipalities Preparatory to Habitat II at its second session. He read out the "Santiago Declaration", adopted at that meeting, in which it had been decided to request national preparatory committees to allow local government an active place in the national delegations attending the Habitat II Conference, so that they could be fully involved in drafting the global plan of action on human settlements.

30. The work of the technical stage was carried out in plenary meetings, in parallel with a drafting group, open to all delegations, which undertook the drafting of the Regional Plan of Action.

31. The plenary meetings began with a presentation of the ECLAC Secretariat's preparatory work. A broad description was given of the changes which had taken place since the Vancouver Conference of 1976, showing the close relationship between demographic, social and economic processes, and trends in the problems surrounding human settlements. A summary presentation was also given of the document "Human Settlements: The Shelter of Development", which dealt with urbanization, cities and housing. ECLAC had identified five main challenges to urban development and housing: the productivity of settlements, social equity and the fight against poverty, improving the urban environment, participation and governability, and increasing the efficiency of instruments for planning and management.

32. Delegations considered that the document made a serious and well-informed contribution to an understanding of the situation in the region. It would help them to reach agreement on a regional plan

of action and to consolidate a common position before the Istanbul Conference. Proposals would be formulated on the basis of the five themes contained in the document's conclusions.

33. Delegations put forward several suggestions for expanding the information in the document and complementing it with other themes. It was suggested that a fuller analysis of the situation in some countries should be included, in particular the Caribbean subregion.

34. It was noted that, although Latin America and the Caribbean was a predominantly urban region, many countries still had low levels of urbanization, and phenomena such as rural-urban migration and the problems of medium-sized and rural settlements remained important priorities.

35. It was also felt to be desirable to analyse different countries' housing and urban development policies and programmes, in order to evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness and compare experiences in various fields such as urban land management and the environment.

36. Some delegations drew attention to the environment and appropriate use of energy and water as important concerns. Problems of particular relevance to small island States were also mentioned, such as the inelasticity of land.

37. There was a full discussion on the various aspects of the development of cities and their chief problems. Delegations attached special importance to the need to examine the relationship between the macroeconomic context and the development of cities, in order to identify useful and successful experiences in coordinating urban policies with the model of development. There was a need to bring the image of a continent of large cities into line with the reality of many medium-sized and small centres of population, and with the processes of rural-urban migration in some countries. Delegations felt that that would require placing urban development in the broadest possible context of land management.

38. With regard to an analysis of the housing situation, the representatives felt that housing should be looked at not in isolation but in the context of its surroundings and related services. They emphasized the need for a stable, consistent framework for developing true policies of State, rather than merely the policies of a single administration. It was important to recognize that large segments of the population were living in informal settlements and housing, and that the situation called for developing the capacity

of people not only to produce their own habitat, but also to participate in policy decisions and to have a say in their implementation.

39. On the theme of the productivity and competitiveness of human settlements, the delegations felt that those concepts needed to be clarified in terms of their precise significance in relation to human settlements and their implications in a scenario of market liberalization and globalization. They recognized that certain features of competitiveness varied from one subregion to another; in the Caribbean, for example, the concept was relevant not to the city alone, but to the city and its surroundings as a whole. To realize urban potential to the full, infrastructure would have to be improved, and that task would require coordination with the private sector in order to put together the resources required for investment and administration of services.

40. They next took up the theme of overcoming poverty. They affirmed that it would require strong and broad-based political and social commitment and a clear delineation of the roles of the State and the private sector in order to combat segregation. They also stressed the importance of improving instruments for measuring poverty and pointed out that housing programmes were not the only tool for combating poverty and should be part of integrated plans that were in harmony with macroeconomic policy. Policies on housing, rehabilitation, sanitation and related areas should include targeting criteria and subsidies that were suited to the realities of each country.

41. On the topic of governability and decentralization, they felt that the municipality was the strategic unit for promoting integrated and participative development of human settlements; it was therefore necessary to streamline technical and administrative procedures at the local level and to strengthen municipal resources. They also saw a need to promote social consensus and to rescale and redefine the role of the State in the direction of gradual decentralization. Finally, it was recalled that the aim of decentralization was to arrive at solutions that were more efficient and closer to the needs and desires of the people. The fragmentation observable in cities, especially in large metropolitan areas, made it harder to develop civic participation; in this regard, there was an important distinction between city and municipality.

42. Environmental sustainability was felt to be an issue of increasing importance and one relevant to the competitiveness of human settlements in the region. It was pointed out that legislation on the subject

of the urban environment was inadequate and was not coordinated with urban ordinances. A need was seen to evaluate environmental impact on the municipal level and to monitor and penalize negative effects on the environment in both large cities and small. The issue was of particular importance to small island States, which were more vulnerable to environmental damage; deterioration of their beaches, for example, affected tourism, their main source of income. Training qualified technicians and educating the population were viewed as fundamental for encouraging appropriate attitudes and instituting adequate controls in the area of environmental sustainability.

43. Turning to the theme of policy efficiency, some delegations saw a need to expand the policy horizon to include the territory in which cities were located in order to achieve greater efficiency. It was also pointed out that the new macroeconomic context would have an impact on the efficiency of policies; instances cited were the new wave of migrations resulting from changes in patterns of production in the rural economy and greater urban concentration resulting from the need for access to transport, communication and information services. Finally, the importance was stressed of putting short-term economic efficiency in perspective in relation to social criteria of effectiveness, such as quality of life.

44. In the final stage of the plenary, the delegations discussed the draft regional plan of action presented by the open-ended drafting group.

Ministerial stage

45. The delegations of Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela participated in the ministerial stage. The representative of the Latin American Episcopal Council also spoke.

46. The delegations expressed appreciation to ECLAC for preparing the document "Human settlements: the shelter of development",¹ to which they referred in considering the various items on the agenda.

¹ LC/L.906(Conf.85/3).

47. The statements provided information on the experiences of various countries in the region in the field of human settlements, housing and urban development, and on the activities of the national preparatory committees for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

48. Several key issues were highlighted by the delegations. Among them were the trend towards regional urbanization as part of a thorough economic and social transformation; the need to achieve social equity and to alleviate urban poverty; the productivity of human settlements in the context of enhancing the quality of life; the improvement of the environment in human settlements; the challenge of governability, social integration and citizen participation, and the need for efficient policies and management.

49. Other issues mentioned were the need to enhance the quality and productivity of urban infrastructure and services, the problems of access to housing and land, the need for increased technical and financial assistance, the rural population's limited participation in the benefits of development, rural-urban migration and the consumption of productive land caused by the expansion of cities. Stress was laid also on the importance of the contribution which the private sector could make to the provision of housing and infrastructure and on the need for decentralization of public and social-welfare housing expenditure and for targeted and transparent subsidies.

50. Several speakers referred to the importance of facilitating exchanges of experience among countries in the field of human settlements, housing and urban development, and to the search for common regional positions. In addition, some delegations highlighted the contribution of the informal sector to housing creation.

51. The Caribbean delegations emphasized the specific traits which human settlements issues were acquiring in the subregion. In that connection, they referred to topographical constraints, the risk of natural disasters, the fragile ecological balance, economic vulnerability and other matters, and drew attention to the Bridgetown Declaration of Ministers Responsible for Shelter and Human Settlements.

52. The participants in the ministerial stage took cognizance of the Regional Plan of Action on Human Settlements drafted by the participants in the technical stage of the Meeting and made comments on, and changes to, the initial version. This document is the subject of regional consensus on the issues discussed by the countries at the Regional Meeting, and will be submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements at its third session for inclusion in the global plan of action to be adopted at the Istanbul Conference.

