Berlin Declaration on the Urban Future

Declaration of the official (governmental) URBAN 21 Conference

6 July 2000

We, citizens and representatives of 1000 cities, governments and civil society organisations from over 100 countries from all regions of the world, met in Berlin, from the 4th to the 6th of July 2000, at the Global Conference on the Urban Future - URBAN 21. We commend this declaration to the public and as a contribution to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly - Istanbul +5.

We took into consideration the following realities:
- For the first time in human history, a majority of the world's six billion people will live in cities.
- The world is facing explosive growth of urban population, mainly in the developing world.
- Urban poverty, affecting especially women and children, is on the increase, with one in four of the world's urban population living below the poverty line.
- In many countries, social conditions continue to deteriorate and the health and well being of their citizens are threatened by the HIV-epidemic and the reappearance of major infectious diseases.
- We live in a world of great diversity, in which there is no simple answer and no single solution to the problems and challenges facing our cities.
- Many cities, confronted with hypergrowth, are failing to cope with the challenges of generating employment, providing adequate housing and meeting the basic needs of their citizens.
- Some highly dynamic cities have achieved development with equity, with poverty substantially reduced, illiteracy eliminated, the women educated and empowered, and birth rates falling.
- Other cities face an ageing population, urban decay, unsustainable use of resources and the need to adapt and change.
- No city in any part of the world is free of problems; in particular, none is truly sustainable.

We also took into account the following trends, fully aware of their positive and negative implications:

- Globalisation and the information technology revolution will increasingly create a borderless world with a new role for cities.
- Economies and societies are becoming increasingly knowledge based.
- The world is becoming not only a community of nation states, but also a galaxy of interconnected cities.
- Power is being shared more evenly between national governments, regions and cities.
- The governance of cities is becoming increasingly democratic.
- There is growing awareness of the rights of women, the indivisibility of human rights and the need for participation and environmental stewardship.
- New partnerships between the public sector, private sector and civil society are evolving.
We affirm the following principles:

- The principle of sustainable development
- The principle of non-discrimination and gender equality
- The principle of cultural and religious tolerance
- The principle of good governance
- The principle of subsidiarity
- The principle of interdependence
- The principle of human solidarity

We also believe that, to different degrees and with different priorities, all human beings, irrespective of race, religion and gender, share certain common aspirations which cities should attempt to fulfil:

- Freedom from poverty
- Satisfying work which yields sufficient income
- Living in ecological harmony with nature
- Access to clean air, safe water and adequate sanitation
- Adequate housing and security of tenure
- Ability to move easily from home to work, shops, schools and other destinations
- Life in stable and integrated communities of friends and neighbours
- Enjoying the political rights of citizenship, including the right of participation in decision-making, and the right of access to information and justice
- Feeling safe and secure in their persons and belongings.

We therefore recommend the following actions as the most urgent:

- Cities and other levels of government should adopt effective urban policies and planning processes, which integrate the social, economic, environmental and spatial aspects of development, recognising the interdependence between the city and the region, and between the urban, rural and wilderness areas.
- Cities should strive to alleviate poverty and meet the basic needs of their citizens by promoting economic opportunity and enabling community action.
- Cities should adopt social policies and measures which will lead to the reduction of violence and crime.
- Cities should embrace information and communication technologies and promote the life-long education of all their citizens to become learning cities and to achieve global competitiveness.
- Cities should promote the use of environmentally friendly technologies and materials, including renewable sources of energy and higher efficiency in the use of natural resources.
- Cities should strive to promote local economic development, including recognising the role of the informal sector and integrating the informal into the formal economy.
- Cities should, in co-operation with other levels of government, provide incentives, regulations and benchmarks, which will encourage the private sector to think globally, act locally and reach out to the poor in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Cities should, where appropriate, consider accepting and integrating informal settlements into the existing urban structure and social life.
- Cities should conserve their historical heritage and aspire to become beautiful places where art, culture, architecture and landscape bring joy and inspiration to the citizens.
· Cities should adopt appropriate land use planning and implementation measures with a view to promoting vibrant economies, functioning land markets, affordable housing and suitable infrastructure.
· Cities should promote the development of an appropriate integrated public transport system which is fast, safe, accessible and affordable; better manage the use of the private car, and encourage the use of environmentally friendly means of transport.
· Cities should attempt to achieve a good balance between the natural and built environment and should take action to reduce air, water, land and noise pollution, thereby enhancing the citizens’ quality of life.
· Cities should govern themselves and order their relations with all their citizens, without discrimination, in accordance with the principles of democracy and good governance, with special outreach to women, youth and minorities.
· Cities should establish forums, bilateral and multilateral partnerships to facilitate networking, mutual help and the faster dissemination of best practices.
· Nongovernmental organisations and community-based organisations should be empowered to participate fully in equitable and sustainable development.
· The private sector, local, national and international, should bring to bear financial instruments and investments in a manner that promotes sustainable urban development.
· National governments should give high priority to their urban development policies in the framework of national and regional policies.
· National and regional governments should ensure that cities have sufficient power and resources to carry out their functions and responsibilities.
· The World Bank, the UN Development Programme, the UN Centre for Human Settlements, other international agencies and bilateral donors should intensify their cooperation with cities, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations in the fields of housing, urban development and poverty alleviation.

We conclude on an optimistic note.

We are entering the urban millennium. Cities, always the engines of economic growth and incubators of civilisation, today are beset by tremendous challenges. Millions of men, women and children face a daily struggle for survival. Can we turn this around? Can we give our people hope for a brighter future? We believe that if we harness the positive forces of education and sustainable development, globalisation and information technology, democracy and good governance, the empowerment of women and civil society, we shall truly build cities of beauty, ecology, economy and social justice.