ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS TO ENSURE MORE EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS* 

Note by the Secretariat

The Habitat Conference in Vancouver will have before it three major issues for consideration and decision:

(a) Declaration of principles;
(b) Recommendations for national action; and
(c) Proposals for international co-operation.

The alternative institutional arrangements, as submitted by the Habitat secretariat for the consideration of the Preparatory Committee at its second session, are set forth below. After being discussed by the Committee and amended, taking into account its recommendations, this document will become a policy paper for the Vancouver Conference.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the field of human endeavour, the matter of human settlements is, without doubt, one of the most deeply rooted at national and even local level. The

* This paper was prepared by the Habitat secretariat after extensive consultations with those parts of the United Nations system most closely concerned. However, the views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the Habitat secretariat.
assessment of the issues involved, the elaboration of alternative strategies to
deal with them, the choice of appropriate policies and, most important, the
implementation of programmes deriving from such policies are matters of national
concern.

2. In formulating solutions for national problems, it is, however, of vital
importance to all countries to take advantage of the experience and the support
available at the international level, including the transfer of resources or ideas.

3. In the field of human settlements, as in others of United Nations system
activity, the goal of international co-operation must be to support national action
in the pursuit of national objectives and in accordance with national values.

4. Among the chief issues on the agenda of the Stockholm Conference was the
question of human settlements since it constitutes a very important part of the
human environment and one of the main recommendations of that Conference to the
General Assembly was that a world-wide conference on human settlements be
convened.

5. In setting up Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, the
General Assembly stressed "the need for international efforts to develop new and
additional approaches to these problems, especially in the developing countries". 1/

6. Recognizing the importance of this issue, it was proposed that international
co-operation be one of the principal themes to be placed before the Conference.
It was also suggested that, among the outcomes of the Conference, there be a
proposal for new institutional arrangements in this field, in order to respond
promptly to the needs of the international community. Accordingly, formal and
informal consultations on this question were held with Governments and
representatives of the main international organizations concerned, both within and
outside the United Nations system.

7. The above-mentioned consultations and the informal and formal 2/ sessions of
the Preparatory Committee and of the regional preparatory meetings held in June and
July 1975 culminated in the convening of two ad hoc intergovernmental working
groups of experts at Geneva on 22 to 26 September 1975, one of which was exclusively
devoted to international co-operation (document A/CONF.70/PC/20).

8. Other consultations proceeded in parallel within the framework of the regular
activities of the system, in particular the Ad Hoc Inter-agency Meeting on
Housing and Urbanization of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and
the ninth session of the Committee for Housing, Building and Planning which were
held at Geneva on 8 to 10 and 13 to 24 October 1975 respectively (documents

1/ A/Resolution 3001 (XXVII).
2/ The informal session was held from 21 to 31 May 1974, the first session
from 15 to 24 January 1975 and the resumed first session from 25 to 29 August 1975.
II. SCOPE OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

9. This wide exchange of views revealed the broad scope for more and better international co-operation in the field of human settlements and also the fact that this area has received considerably less attention in international co-operation than fields such as agriculture, industrial development, transport or, more recently, energy. In spite of the fact that the main responsibility in the area of human settlements lies with national action, the supporting role of international co-operation can be an important one, particularly, but not exclusively, between and for the benefit of developing countries.

10. All countries, industrialized or developing, with market or centrally planned economies, highly urbanized or predominantly rural, share a common concern for human settlements and have come to expect from the international community the performance of a number of key functions, some of which have received insufficient attention so far. The most important of these are:

   (a) Promotion of changes in policies and institutions urgently required to introduce a comprehensive approach to human settlements;

   (b) Establishment and development, at national, regional and global levels, of an efficient mechanism for the collection, analysis, processing and dissemination of information on human settlements to assist Governments and individuals in achieving the objectives of national policies;

   (c) Assistance to Governments, either individually or in suitable regional or subregional groups, in the establishment of appropriate instruments and institutions in crucial areas such as legislation, finance, education and training, taxation, local government and public administration, land use control and environmental management;

   (d) Promotion of innovative approaches to the solutions of human settlement problems by supporting existing research institutes, facilitating and expanding their exchanges of ideas, programmes and staff, initiating and, if necessary, sponsoring new programmes and, in general, providing a focal point for a global network of concerned institutions;

   (e) Undertaking, at the request of Member Governments, of the studies necessary to evaluate the social, economic and technical viability of programmes and projects in the field of human settlements, drawing on the best international expertise available;

   (f) Provision of a suitable mechanism for mobilizing and directing financial and other resources to countries needing them for the elaboration and implementation of their national programmes and, in general, mobilization of international interest in this area; and, finally,

   (g) Evolution of a better machinery for the harmonization and, where required, the co-ordination of international efforts in the human settlement field, taking
into account not only the activities of the United Nations system but also those of other intergovernmental (multinational and bilateral) and non-governmental organizations who are interested and concerned.

III. EXISTING BODIES

11. From the very nature of the concept of human settlements, which is meant to embrace the spatial dimension of man's living and working conditions, it follows that all intergovernmental organizations deploy some activities related, directly or indirectly, to human settlements, although at different levels of concern. However, within the United Nations system proper there are only two organizations whose secretariat is directly, and in some cases exclusively, concerned with human settlement matters, namely the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (mostly through the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning at global level, and through the appropriate divisions or sections of the secretariats of the regional economic commissions, at the regional level) and the United Nations Environment Programme whose Governing Council attaches a high priority to the human settlements programme. As a result of this UNEP has, inter alia, promoted and co-operated financially in the organization of the Habitat Conference and the creation of the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation. A brief description of the composition, structure and activities of the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning, UNEP and the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation is provided in the following paragraphs.

12. The Centre for Housing, Building and Planning (CHBP) was established in 1965 by ECOSOC 3/ as a constituent unit of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at United Nations Headquarters in New York, it comprises:

(a) The Office of the Director responsible for over-all policy and control;

(b) A research and development branch responsible for carrying out studies at the request of the General Assembly and ECOSOC for conducting research and disseminating information and for organizing seminars and meetings; this branch comprises four sections: planning, housing, building and report and documentation;

(c) A technical co-operation branch responsible for selection of experts for field work, selection and evaluation of subcontractors, organization of special training programmes and advising on the supply of technical equipment; this branch is divided according to geographic regions.

13. The total staff of the Centre comprises over 60 people of whom 40 are professionals, 10 of these being financed by UNDP.

14. The Centre acts as the secretariat for the Economic and Social Council Committee of Housing, Building and Planning which was established in 1962. 4/

3/ E/Resolution 1024 C (XXXVII).
4/ E/Resolution 903 C (XXXIV).

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The Committee has 27 members elected by the Council on a broad regional basis for a period of three years and renewable by a third annually; the Committee meets every two years. It is a standing committee of the Council and reports directly to that body.

15. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established by the General Assembly in 1972. Its organs comprise the Governing Council, the Environment secretariat located at Nairobi, Kenya, the Environment Fund and the Environment Co-ordination Board. The main functions of UNEP are to promote international co-operation in the field of the environment, to provide general policy guidelines within the United Nations system, to keep under review the world environment situation, to promote the contribution of international scientific and professional communities through the exchange of information and to review the impact of national and international environmental policies.

16. The UNEP Governing Council comprises 58 members elected for three years by the General Assembly according to the following geographic distribution: Africa 16, Asia 13, Eastern Europe 6, Latin America 10 and Western Europe 13. The Governing Council meets annually and reports to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council.

17. The Environment secretariat comprises:

(a) The Office of the Executive Director, which is assisted by the Policy Planning and External Relations Offices;

(b) The Bureau of the Programme, divided into three major programme divisions, including the Division of Economic and Social Programmes, plus a division on technical assistance and training;

(c) The Bureau of Environment Fund and Management, which comprises divisions for Fund policies and resources and for Programme management;

(d) Divisions of Communications and Administration;

(e) Regional representations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Far East, Latin America and Western Asia.

The total staff of the Environment secretariat is approximately 300 of whom one third are Professionals. This does not include the temporary secretariat of the Habitat Conference (partially financed by UNEP) whose Secretary-General reports to the Secretary-General of the United Nations through the Executive Director of UNEP.

18. The human settlements component, which is the concern of the Division of

5/ A/Resolution 2997 (XXVII).
Economic and Social Programmes includes assistance to Governments in formulating policy, training, demonstration projects and general co-ordination. The staff of the Division comprises only six Professionals; however, given the structure of the Environment secretariat, this figure should not be compared with that provided in paragraph 13. The above figure refers to the staff working directly within the UNEP secretariat. There are also many more persons working indirectly or on a part-time basis for the human settlements component in UNEP.

19. The United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (formerly called the International Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation) 6/ was established by the General Assembly effective 1 January 1975. Its mandate includes stimulating innovative approaches to pre-investment, pre-project and financing strategies; organizing technical assistance services including training facilities and projects; and promoting the adaptation and transfer of appropriate scientific and technical knowledge. The Governing Council of UNEP establishes its programmes, guidelines and directives and its Executive Director is authorized to launch international fund raising appeals. He is advised by an Advisory Board, composed of 12 to 15 members. The Foundation received an initial allocation of $US 4 million from the Environment Fund. The initial manning table of the Foundation provides for 28 Professionals.

IV. A COMMON VIEW

20. The activities of these bodies and those of the principal international organizations concerned were reviewed in a report prepared by the Centre for Research on International Organizations at the request of the Habitat secretariat (document A/CONF.70/WG/3). In its conclusion, the author of the report identified three major short-comings of the existing system of international multilateral co-operation in the human settlements field:

(a) Lack of a clear concept or basic guidelines for international action: on the whole, international organizations appear to undertake such action on a piecemeal basis, with little concern for the broader issues lying outside their terms of reference or for the complexity of the interrelationship between sectors of policy decisions;

(b) Ineffectiveness of the existing co-ordination machinery, in most cases limited to informal exchanges of views and ad hoc contacts, seldom concerned with long-term planning or policy formulation; and

(c) Inadequacy of the present arrangements for information exchange, which are dispersed throughout the United Nations family of organizations and in any case do not appear to serve those most likely to benefit from them.

21. A more detailed analysis, on a programme-by-programme basis, of the current and projected programmes of the main international organizations active in the field is

6/ A/Resolution 3327 (XXIX).
being carried out by the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination, with the assistance of a consultant. The results of this analysis will be submitted for the consideration of the Preparatory Committee at its second session (document A/CONF.70/PC/24). 7/

22. As was mentioned above, the Habitat secretariat convened a meeting of an ad hoc intergovernmental working group of experts at Geneva in September 1975, to start discussing the theme of international co-operation in the field of human settlements. The general consensus emerging from the review of the problem carried out by that group can be summed up as follows:

(a) Human settlement policies, strategies and programmes must receive the highest priority at the national level;

(b) Greater efforts must be made at the regional and global levels to assist this process;

(c) A rearrangement of the present system of international co-operation in the field of human settlements is essential adequately to support expanded national activities;

(d) A proliferation of United Nations bodies is undesirable; instead, an innovative and imaginative rearrangement of existing ones, particularly those controlled by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Environment Programme, should be undertaken;

(e) Proposals for rearrangement must not only be placed within the framework of the current review of the structure of the United Nations system as a whole, but should also have a positive influence upon the process;

(f) Activities at the global level should be confined to those which cannot adequately be undertaken at the regional level, since regional instruments for co-operation have proved to be the most effective in helping to satisfy national objectives; and

(g) Proposals concerning international co-operation should not be limited to United Nations bodies, but should include intergovernmental, multilateral and bilateral, as well as appropriate non-governmental channels.

V. THREE ALTERNATIVES

23. During the discussions of the Group, it was noted that the General Assembly, at its thirty-first session, would review the whole administrative and operational structure of the United Nations system as well as the future structure of UNEP.

7/ This document will be available shortly.
This would influence any decision which could be taken by the Assembly in regard to the institutional arrangements in the area of human settlements.

24. In the meantime, it became apparent that the Governments wished to focus discussions on a limited number of alternative institutional arrangements and that particular interest was shown in three of these, briefly described below:

(a) Concentration of all secretariat activities at global level within an expanded and upgraded unit of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, serving either a permanent Human Settlements Commission of the Economic and Social Council itself. This unit would work in close liaison with corresponding units within the secretariat of the regional commissions, serving, where appropriate, regional human settlement committees as permanent bodies of the corresponding regional commissions;

(b) Grouping of all secretariat activities at global level with the United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Foundation and governed by the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council. At the regional level the Foundation would operate through corresponding specialized units of UNEP regional representatives, working closely with and appropriately strengthening the staff of the corresponding regional commission secretariats in the field of human settlements; and

(c) Establishment of a separate programme, similar but distinct from the United Nations Environment Programme, solely concerned with human settlements and guided by its own governing council. At the regional level, the programme would operate through the machinery of the regional economic commissions, and, in particular, through human settlements units serving permanent human settlements committees.

25. The most significant aspects of each alternative, analysed under appropriate functional headings, are presented in the paragraphs below. It may appear, however, that the following features would be common to all proposed arrangements:

(a) Member States would be offered a high level, global policy-making body, solely concerned with human settlement issues, whose constituency would be the national organs responsible in this field;

(b) Implementation of programmes and, in general, all operational responsibilities, would be decentralized to at least the regional level;

(c) Staff and functions of the units of the United Nations Secretariat presently concerned with human settlements at global level would be brought under a single direction and report to a single legislative body;

(d) Key functions of the secretariat at global level would be promotion, information and monitoring; and

(e) The legislative body would be advised by a board made up of highly qualified persons representing a broad range of experience and acting in a personal capacity.

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VI. ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

26. To facilitate the understanding of the most salient differences between the proposed alternatives, these are described below under three functional headings: governing bodies (at global and regional level), secretariat (at global and regional level) and funding.

Governing bodies

27. At global level, the legislative bodies of the three alternatives would have broadly similar functions although their constitution and status would be different. In alternative (a) the body would be a permanent commission of the Economic and Social Council, with broad membership and with functions and status similar to that of other existing commissions, such as the Population and Statistical Commissions; in alternative (b) its legislative body would be the same Governing Council of UNEP, but there could be a sessional committee of the Governing Council on human settlements; and in alternative (c) it would be a self-contained, specialized governing council, reporting directly to the Economic and Social Council, along the lines of the existing UNEP Governing Council.

28. At the regional level, alternatives (a) and (c) would be virtually identical, since they would involve the establishment of permanent human settlements committees of the regional economic commissions at a high level, preferably ministerial, meeting at least as often as the mother commission. Alternative (b), following current UNEP policy, does not foresee any specialized legislative function at the level of the regions but could readily be adapted to service regional committees.

Secretariat

29. At global level, the grouping of both the staff and functions of the existing specialized units of the United Nations Secretariat would be a common feature of the three alternatives. However, in alternative (a) this unit would grow around the existing Centre for Housing, Building and Planning and be totally integrated in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; in alternative (b), it could be based on an enlarged United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Foundation and, in alternative (c), it would be an independent unit with only professional links with the rest of the system at global level. In alternatives (a) and (c), special arrangements might be required to preserve the identity of the United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Foundation.

30. At regional level, alternatives (a) and (c) allow for the strengthening and, where they do not exist, the establishment of specialized units within the secretariat of the regional economic commissions; in the case of alternative (a), these units would receive guidance from the central secretariat, whereas in alternative (c) they would be practically independent from the centre, which might however fund posts within the regional secretariat in areas of special interest. Following current practice, alternative (b) would lead to the strengthening of UNEP regional representatives' offices by the establishment of specialized units within them; these would be expected to work closely with their corresponding units, with the regional economic commission secretariats and within the regional offices of the specialized units.
Funding

31. It is difficult to elaborate at this stage on the possible differences between alternatives in relation to the funding of their operations. The assumption that the functions and resources of the existing units of the secretariat would be grouped under a single organization, would imply that the new organizations would carry at least the appropriate share of the regular budget funds supporting the corresponding activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNEP, the funds currently channelled by UNDP for the support of technical assistance functions, and, of course, the special sources of funding of the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, which has a mandate to launch fund-raising appeals.

32. Additional resources required to finance an expanded programme of international co-operation could be raised either through a separate fund which could be established as an outcome of the Habitat Conference or by voluntary contributions earmarked for specific human settlement programmes and channelled through UNDP, in a similar fashion to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

VII. MAIN ADVANTAGES

33. The main advantages of each alternative are summed up in the following paragraphs.

34. Alternative (a)

(a) By building around the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning, the considerable expertise of this body could be utilized without serious disruption of its operation;

(b) Because of its location within the Economic and Social Council system, the integration of human settlements programmes with economic and social planning would be facilitated;

(c) Given the existing structure of UNDP, operational links with technical assistance operations at global level would be strengthened; and

(d) The fact that the regional economic commissions are within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would facilitate the upgrading of their role in human settlements.

35. Alternative (b)

(a) By placing the organizations firmly within the ambit of an expanded United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Foundation, the close interaction between the natural and man-made environments would be stressed and an intersectoral approach facilitated;

(b) The United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Foundation is already in existence and most of the new functions could be incorporated within its framework;

(c) Collaboration with UNEP would be facilitated; and
(d) UNEP is at present reviewing its own structure, so the proposed change could be readily incorporated.

36. **Alternative (c)**

(a) By establishing a new identity, a higher-level independent leadership for the promotion of the human settlement concept might be created;

(b) The risk of competing with the natural environment activities, especially in the third world, would be minimized;

(c) The level of national representation on the legislative body at global level might be higher; and

(d) A new institutional concept could point to new directions for over-all structural changes within the United Nations.

**VIII. TRANSITIONAL AND OTHER ARRANGEMENTS**

37. Institutional changes of the kind indicated in the preceding paragraphs require a great deal of pre-planning; their implementation, even after the approval, in principle, of the appropriate legislative bodies, must of necessity be phased over a period of time, with a view to minimizing the disruption of existing activities. Governments may however wish to consider programmes of international co-operation requiring urgent action, even before proposals for institutional changes have followed their normal process. A selection of programmes will be contained in a separate note by the secretariat (document A/CONF.70/PC/25), 8/ to be submitted for the consideration of the Preparatory Committee at its second session. Many of these proposals could be initiated within the framework of the existing institutional system.

38. It should also be noted that, in the presentation of alternatives, emphasis has been placed solely on differences or similarities in institutional structures. The character of the activities to be carried out within the broad framework of the functions listed in paragraph 10 above would depend on many external factors not considered here, including those arising from the proposed changes in the United Nations structure, currently under consideration by a Committee of the General Assembly. This applies, in particular, to the degree of desirable centralization of activities in relation to the regions, the role of UNDP and other related technical assistance operations, the channelling of funds through global or regional organs, general or specialized, the direct involvement of the central unit in project implementation in fields such as research, education and training, management support and so on. At this stage, any of the institutional arrangements outlined above can be seen as applicable to a wide range of alternative strategies.

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8/ This document will be available shortly.
39. The matter of financial transfers has not been considered in this paper. It is however apparent that any new institution should establish the closest collaboration with the bilateral and multilateral financial institutions active in this field, in particular the World Bank and the Regional Development Banks. It is to be hoped that these institutions themselves will consider reviewing their policies in relation to human settlements, in the light of the recommendations of the Habitat Conference. It is hoped, in particular, that they will recognize that, given the disproportion between international financial flow and national needs, the former should be mostly directed to assist programmes rather than projects.

40. This paper does not touch upon the important issue of general, system-wise co-ordination because the role of the current co-ordinating machinery within the United Nations family is under a review, the implications of which will affect every sectoral or functional interest, including that of human settlements; it is however considered essential to establish such a type of co-ordination, particularly in the case of alternative (c).