



ASIA-PACIFIC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

PRESS RELEASE

First Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Human Settlements

Date: 13-16 December 2006,
Venue: Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, India

Website: www.unhabitat.org/apmc or www.ampcindia.com

Ministers of housing from some 70 countries across the Asia-Pacific will gather in the Indian capital New Delhi 13-16 December at the region's first high-level meeting aimed at tackling shelter problems in a part of the world that is home to two-thirds of the global slum population.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Human Settlements (APMCHHS) is being jointly organized by UN-HABITAT and the Indian Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.

The conference theme, "A vision for sustainable urbanisation in the Asia-Pacific by 2020", is aimed at galvanizing government action and political commitment at the regional level to improve the lives 581 million slum dwellers. The conference is expected to produce a new vision of what the region's urban landscape will look like in the next 15 years. It is thus expected to capitalize on the opportunities of its rapid economic growth by engaging in a creative dialogue on measures to implement effective and sustainable urbanisation policies.

Despite its rapid economic growth and many dynamic economies in a rapidly urbanizing region, over two-thirds of the developing world's population living in overcrowded conditions resides in Asia. UN-HABITAT research shows that overcrowding and poor ventilation is directly related to the rates of illness, child mortality, crime and other anti-social behaviour.

Globally, half of humanity already lives in cities. Fifty years ago, that figure was just one-third. In Asia, where 40 percent of people lived in towns and cities last year, the urban proportion of the population is expected to soar to 56 per cent by 2030.

"Never before in history has the world witnessed such a rapid growth of urbanisation. How we manage this situation is arguably the biggest problem confronting humanity in the 21st century," said the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka said in a statement.

By 2020, Asia will be home to 12 of the world's largest cities with populations of over 20 million. Despite impressive growth in China and India in the last decade, to cite to recent examples of UN-HABITAT research, neither country has been able to bridge the gap between rich and poor, whether in the countryside or in cities. In the year 2001, 38 per cent of urban residents in China lived in slums, compared to 56 per cent in India. In Bangladesh, 85 per cent of the urban populations live in slums, while Pakistan stood

at 74 per cent. Four out of 10 children living in the slums of Bangladesh and Nepal are undernourished. Urban crime increases are directly linked to growing urban poverty; the list goes on.

This huge urban growth in the region is crying out for new methods of urban planning, management, financing and service delivery aimed at creating socially inclusive cities. The conference will thus seek to share experiences and learn from best practices in the implementation of pro-poor urban policies and enabling legislation.

Ministers will seek to develop a uniform mechanism for monitoring and reporting progress in the Asia-Pacific region on the Millennium Development Goals, especially Target 10 on halving the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation by the year 2015. Likewise, Target 11 on improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

“With 1 billion people living in slums, and thousands joining them every day, we are indeed sitting on a social time bomb that is ticking away quietly in many overcrowded, poverty-stricken corners of a geopolitical chessboard already fraught with problems,” Mrs. Tibaijuka added. “If current trends continue, UN-HABITAT estimates that the global slum population will reach 1.4 billion by the 2020 target date. What will be the implications for the Asia-Pacific region then?”

The New Delhi conference follows closely in the footsteps of two similar regional conferences in Latin America (MINURVI) and in Africa (AMCHUD). In both regions, permanent secretariats have been established as part of a political process aimed at keep growing urban poverty high on the agenda. The process has been repeatedly backed by the 58 member governments of the Governing Council that meets every two years to set UN-HABITAT work programme.

In a statement leading up to the conference, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India said: “Cities and towns are centres of growth and generators of employment opportunities. Our cities need to have a new look for which they need massive investment and renewal. They need basic amenities like sanitation, drinking water and proper housing for the poor. They need public transport, parks and playgrounds. We need cities in which the working poor can live with self-respect and dignity; cities in which children and women feel safe and secure. ... I see a glorious decade of city development ahead of us.”

Besides the ministers, Prime Minister Singh and Mrs. Tibaijuka, other personalities expected to attend proceedings and visit the city exhibition at New Delhi’s Vigyan Bhawan conference centre, are President APJ Abdul Kalam of India, and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi.

Some of the key outputs envisioned include a work programme so that future high-level meetings can discuss progress on socially inclusive housing and urban policies by learning from best practices and pro-poor policies and rights-based legislation. Other key points include the development of a regional mechanism for monitoring progress on the Millennium Development Goals, fostering new partnerships to support implementation of the goals and the Habitat Agenda, and the global blueprint for equitable shelter and sustainable cities.

For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson & Head, Press & Media Relations Unit, or Ms. Zahra A. Hassan, Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: 7623153, 7623136, 7623151, Fax: 7624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, website: www.unhabitat.org