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## What is "Human Settlements"

### Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements (1976)

In 1976 in Vancouver, the United Nations held its first conference on the issue of physical and spatial organization of human life on this planet, and on the national and international actions needed to accommodate the growing number of population in urban and rural communities. This conference, called Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, established the concept of human settlements to consist of several elements that had been previously considered separately from one another - housing, building, planning and the relationship of these and such other activities as environmental change and national and international development. Vancouver Declaration defined human settlements as follows:

Human settlements means the totality of the human community - whether city, town or village - with all the social, material, organizational, spiritual and cultural elements that sustain it. The fabric of human settlements consists of physical elements and services to which these elements provide the material support. The physical components comprise,

**Shelter**, i.e. the superstructures of different shapes, size, type and materials erected by mankind for security, privacy and protection from the elements and for his singularity within a community;

**Infrastructure**, i.e. the complex networks designed to deliver to or remove from the shelter people, goods, energy or information;

**Services** cover those required by a community for the fulfilment of its functions as a social body, such as education, health, culture, welfare, recreation and nutrition.

### Broadened Concept of Human Settlements as a Framework for Economic and Social Development

Over the years, this concept of human settlements has been broadened to become a framework for an overall national socio-economic development in the context of formulating global shelter strategies for the year 2000. It is now contended that human settlements are the spatial dimension as well as the physical expression of economic and social activity. No creative act takes place without being influenced by settlement conditions. In turn, the creation of workable human settlements inevitably becomes an objective of, an indicator of and a prerequisite for social and economic development. Settlements are an objective of development in that places where people can live, learn and work in conditions of safety, comfort and efficiency are a fundamental and elementary need. Settlements are also an indicator, in that they are the most visible expression of a society's ability to satisfy some of the fundamental needs of its members: they can mark accomplishments as well as expose destitution, neglect and inequality. Finally, settlements are a prerequisite for social and economic development, in that no social progress for sustainable economic growth can occur without efficient settlements systems and settlement networks.

### Urbanization

Urban population in the Asia and Pacific region is growing at an average annual rate of 3 per cent, having doubled between 1960 and 1980 from 359 million to 688 million.

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The total urban population in the region at present is about 850 million containing 40% of the world urban population. By the year 2000, an estimated 300 million more population will be added during the decade in urban areas in the region, including 14 of the world's 22 mega-cities with more than 10,000,000 people.

However, in spite of high population growth rates in many of the large cities, developing nations in the region - even economically fast growing countries - are still characterized by low urbanization levels, if compared to Latin America. This would mean that the growth potential of urban populations is vast. Currently, less than 30% of the region's population live urban areas; the rate will increase to more than 40 per cent in 20 years.

Urban population growth rates are markedly higher than overall national population growth rates. In some countries, notably Bangladesh, cities grow at double the national rate. This rapid urban growth is accompanied by problems of urban congestion, environmental degradation, regional imbalances and a burgeoning population of under and unemployed workers and sprawling slums and squatter settlements.

### **Ministerial Conference on Urbanization**

The first Ministerial Conference on Urbanization in Asia and the Pacific , at Bangkok in 1993. The Ministerial Conference adopted the Regional Action Plan on Urbanization in Asia and the Pacific as a guideline for countries to address the issue of urbanization in the region. It was the first conference on the subject which officially involved local authorities, NGOs, research and training institutes and the media together with representatives of the national governments.

The Regional Action Plan on Urbanization emphasizes building of partnerships between various levels government and the civil society, strengthening of local governments, addressing the issue of urban poverty and the environment. It also emphasizes the need for regional cooperation in promoting sustainable and participatory development of human settlements, particularly urban areas.

### **Habitat II: The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements**

Habitat II was held in April 1996 at Istanbul, Turkey. Popularly called the "City Summit" it brought together high-level representatives of national and local governments, private sector, NGOs, research and training institutions and the media. The Conference adopted the Habitat Agenda, a global action plan to realize sustainable human settlements. The Regional Action Plan and the Habitat Agenda have become the major guide for countries of the region to improve the quality of life and promote the sustainable development of human settlements in the Asia and the Pacific region. What is now required is to follow-up the recommendations the Habitat Agenda and the Regional Action Plan in the country or city context with appropriate actions.