

**United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)**  
**World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities**

Istanbul, 30-31 May 1996

**Final Declaration**

[\(Original in French\)](#)

**We**, representatives of local authorities the world over, serving the populations of rural and urban communities; small, medium and large towns; metropolises and regions; as participants in the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities organised by the Local Authorities Habitat II Steering Committee (G4+) and their associations within the framework of the Partners Forum of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements,

**Aware of the fact that:**

1. the world is being transformed, as a result of a series of far-reaching changes which are fundamentally altering both its perception and its future in relation to the past;
2. the world is becoming increasingly urbanised, and an urban habitat is becoming the reality for most people, which implies the need to become familiar everywhere with the methods of governance and management appropriate to urban societies;
3. revolutions in modes of communication are making the world smaller, thus intensifying the relations between nations and between peoples and increasing awareness of the interdependence of everything and everyone, not only in the management of the environment but also in the processes of development, social problems and security;
4. as globalisation takes place, aspirations regarding the respect of fundamental rights, especially in relation to the governance of human settlements, are becoming universal;
5. the world is increasingly fragmented, as modernisation and the competition associated with it often give rise to exclusion, at international, national and local levels;
6. the world has to reorganise and adjust to the unprecedented challenges facing it in all fields, which place every institution and every actor in a learning situation in relation both to understanding and to managing a reality which is becoming more complex by the day;
7. the world has to revise its patterns of thinking and action in order to achieve viable, mutually supportive, healthier and safer human settlements. For this it is necessary to devise coherent medium- and long-term guiding principles

and, for their implementation, to adopt new negotiating, cooperation and partnership procedures.

To help develop these guiding principles, and to define the processes of partnership necessary for viable, supportive, safer and healthier human settlements,

**We reaffirm that:**

1. as the main arena of social interaction and exchange, the town must be recognised as the pivotal human settlement, around which and within which economic growth and sustainable development, the well-being and social cohesion of the majority of people, capacity for adaptation and technical, social, cultural and political innovation, the invention of our future and a renewed vision of the progress of humanity and the future of our civilisations, will be determined; Such recognition does not signify a lack of understanding of the negative features of urban life, such as the spread of physical and moral misery, the rise in insecurity, the deterioration of the living conditions of an ever growing number of residents, their destructive effects on the environment and on the management of natural resources; on the contrary, it highlights the urgency of finding effective remedies for these problems;
2. sustainable human development is the concept around which the future of our towns and cities must be conceived and organised;
3. every effort must be made to render towns and cities more aware of the concepts of sustainable environmental management - including the preservation of the historic, cultural and natural heritage - more economic in the consumption of non-renewable natural resources and land, more sensitive to air and water pollution and more conscientious about reducing waste and recycling;
4. every effort must be made to overcome the problems of congestion and pollution in towns caused by the growth of traffic;
5. every effort must be made to ensure that towns and cities invigorate rural areas instead of impoverishing them, which means taking more account of the interdependence of town and country;
6. every effort must be made to ensure that towns and cities give more attention to social integration and the struggle against exclusion, in order to avoid weakening the social fabric and jeopardising the notion of belonging and citizenship. This should include positive action to involve all groups and sectors of society in the processes of municipal government, including the preparation of budget programmes;
7. accordingly, sustainable human development must be conceived and enacted essentially at the local level, which is best able to mobilise concrete initiatives from the bottom up, geared towards a truly better individual and collective quality of life, whilst still respecting the proper role of the State in economic and social matters;

8. policies of decentralisation must become the favoured approach in the promotion of sustainable human development and the good governance of human settlements in recognition that a human settlement of a given level is better managed where decisions affecting it are taken at its own level (according to the principle of autonomy); and better governed where the authorities managing it are accessible (according to the principle of proximity), and are selected on a democratic basis;
9. policies of decentralisation must acknowledge that local authorities have a strategic role in order to encourage the expression and mobilisation of local energies, help people to take responsibility for their own affairs, and establish the physical and institutional framework necessary to local development, in conjunction with the State and other actors;
10. to be able to play their role completely in this respect, local authorities must be legally constituted, with adequate powers, must be able fully and without hindrance to undertake the responsibilities which are recognised as their own, and must be able to call upon the necessary financial and human resources and management and training capacity to fulfil their responsibilities;
11. all human settlements are increasingly interdependent, with ever growing flows of trade and other exchanges between them. The intensity of these relations creates the need for the local authorities at all levels to establish stable and sustainable means of financial, social, technical and cultural cooperation between human settlements. This need was strongly confirmed at the Dubai Conference on Best Practices and in its Declaration.

**On the basis of these guiding principles, and in view of our shared objective of making our regions, metropolises, towns and villages supportive, viable, healthy and safe human settlements,**

**We, the delegates to the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, commit ourselves:**

1. to take an active role in responding to the challenges facing humanity; to fight strongly at our level against poverty, ignorance, intolerance, discrimination, exclusion, insecurity, environmental degradation, and cultural levelling; and to promote and strengthen our action for the rights and well-being of children, which should be seen as the ultimate indicator of a healthy society and good governance;
2. to promote within our regions, metropolises, towns and villages participatory development policies rooted in an active partnership with all vital local forces (community-based organisations, neighbourhood or village associations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, professional groupings, trade unions, etc);
3. to devise methods of administration adapted to the complexity and specificity of the local level, as well as appropriate modes of financing and management of human settlements, including regional planning measures;

4. to improve the transparency and efficiency of the management of our regions, metropolises, towns and villages, with the primary aim of providing people with services to meet their needs, and thereby to encourage the development of a sense of civic engagement;
5. to accord every opportunity for full access and participation by women in municipal decision-making by making the necessary provisions for an equitable distribution of power and authority;
6. to strengthen direct cooperation between our local authorities, with the support of the national, regional and international associations of local authorities, in order to encourage meetings between peoples, exchanges of experience and the development of partnerships between local actors. Such cooperation will also help us to build a local vision of the challenges of the future and to draw up appropriate strategies of action, in a constructive dialogue with the States, the international community, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the other partners of civil society;
7. to draw full advantage from the transformation potential of new technological developments in setting up better targeted forms of decentralised cooperation by means of technical assistance, transfers of technology and know-how, and collaboration between practitioners;
8. to develop a constructive dialogue with the States, the international community and all partners about activities and practices at the local level, especially by disseminating information and by producing specific local indicators to facilitate decision-making;
9. to work towards concerting our respective activities more closely, in particular through the global coordination of cities and local authorities established at this Assembly. This coordination will be our voice vis-...-vis the international community, with which it will in particular negotiate the ways and means of implementing at local level the global plan of action in the Habitat Agenda;
10. to play our full part in achieving the fulfilment of the United Nations resolution calling for at least 0.7% of the GNP of the developed countries to be allocated to cooperation programmes with the developing countries;
11. to implement the recommendations of the Conference within our realm of responsibility through involvement in the national committees for HABITAT II, and to evaluate their impact with regard to our respective local authorities;
12. to collaborate with UNESCO in the institution of an international Mayors' Prize for Peace to be awarded to outstanding initiatives taken by local authorities in the implementation of a culture of peace in everyday living.

**We ask the Private Sector:**

1. to recognise the responsibilities and opportunities of good corporate citizenship in the pursuit of its business activities;
2. to join us in the search for new and innovative forms of cooperation and public-private partnership.

### **We ask the International Associations of Cities and Local Authorities:**

1. to work towards establishing an ongoing coordination to serve as the interlocutor and institutional partner of the UN and its specialised Agencies;
2. to direct the Group G4+ to constitute forthwith the standing coordination of the movement of cities and local authorities, endowed with a rotating presidency, having the authority to represent their community and acting by delegation of a Council of Presidents, and served by a secretariat of its own, financed by its constituent organisations;
3. to ensure that the coordination thus created as soon as possible assume terms of reference that would enable it to evolve into some form of official structure linking all the international associations of cities and local authorities, recognised institutionally by the UN;
4. to set up in the framework of this coordination a technical committee to explore ways and means of establishing an **International Fund for Human Development**.

### **We ask the States:**

1. to recognise the driving role of cities and local authorities in sustainable development, and to implement policies geared towards mobilizing more resources for urban development, whilst recognising the needs of rural areas;
2. consequently, to initiate appropriate measures to improve the supply of building land and housing, security of tenure, and the smooth operation of land and housing markets, and to encourage investment by the public and private sectors in urban infrastructure and services;
3. to keep in place the national committees established on a partnership basis for the preparation of HABITAT II, so as to assure the conditions for a constructive dialogue at national level;
4. to take up, follow through and intensify policies of decentralisation and to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity guides the allocation of responsibilities and resources to the different levels of government with regard to the management of human settlements;
5. to put in place the institutional and legal framework for the exercise of local democracy, in order to assure truly democratic representation at the local level;
6. to grant constitutional and legal autonomy to local authorities in relation to their fundamental role of managing human settlements and for their contribution to the preservation of civil peace and the organisation of sustainable local development, within relevant national legal frameworks;
7. to support and encourage the national associations of local authorities in their work of organising and strengthening capacities at local level, and to undertake to consult them on all matters affecting the responsibilities and functions of local authorities;

8. to acknowledge and facilitate municipal and other forms of decentralised international cooperation as relevant forms of cooperation which complement bilateral and multilateral cooperation and are open to linkages with them;
9. to assure an equitable distribution of resources to local authorities, in proportion to their needs, to help them in their battle against poverty, unemployment and exclusion, and to give them the means to ensure decent living conditions for their populations.

**We ask the International Community that:**

1. sustainable human development be placed high on the list of programme priorities of the multilateral agencies, in a coordinated and complementary manner, together with the mobilisation of appropriate resources;
2. the best efforts of the national governments and the international institutions be deployed to encourage those countries which do not yet have democratically elected local authorities to introduce, as soon as possible, the necessary constitutional or legal provisions to enable their citizens freely to elect their local representatives without further delay;
3. steps be taken to draw up, in partnership with the representative associations of local authorities, a **worldwide Charter of local self-government** setting out, for the guidance of all national governments and international agencies, the basic principles which should underlie any democratic local government system. The basis of this Charter should reside in the principle of subsidiarity or proximity whereby decisions should be taken at the level closest to the citizens (municipality or town) and only that which the local level cannot effectively carry out alone should be referred to the higher levels;
4. the Habitat Agenda and its global plan of action provide explicitly for linkages and interfaces with the national plans and local agendas, taking specific regional conditions and priorities into consideration. The definition and organisation of these interfaces should take account of the accumulated experience of local authorities in implementing Local Agenda 21 programmes in pursuance of the global Agenda 21 adopted by the Rio de Janeiro Conference on Environment and Development;
5. worldwide efforts be made in collaboration with national, regional and international associations of local authorities, to provide support for existing training programmes and to set up new training programmes adapted to the realities of each region, which aim at preparing local leaders and officials for the efficient and sustainable management of human settlements;
6. the place of direct cooperation between towns and local authorities be fully recognised in the field of international cooperation, that it be integrated into bilateral and multilateral programmes of cooperation and development assistance, and that substantial resources be made available for its development;
7. the composition of the Commission on Human Settlements be opened to representatives of cities and local authorities duly nominated by their

- international associations, so as to assure the conditions for a constructive dialogue at the international level;
8. national, regional and international associations of local authorities be systematically involved as key partners in the mechanisms for collecting, storing and disseminating information about towns and local authorities and their activities, in partnership with the Indicators Programme and Best Practices Initiative. However, such data collection should not be carried out in ways that are detrimental to practical cooperation between cities and local authorities;
  9. the ongoing coordination called for by this World Assembly should be recognised and considered as the sole interlocutor on behalf of the cities and local authorities to negotiate: policies concerning urban development and management of human settlements within the framework of global sustainable development; and the formulation, definition and implementation of cooperation programmes and development assistance;
  10. they explore with it ways and means of improving the effectiveness of cooperation and development assistance and increasing the resources allocated to urban development and municipal management.

Istanbul, 31 May 1996