

Farewell to my friends in Gigiri

25 March 2011

Excellencies, Executive Director, Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I have made many speeches to bid farewell to departing colleagues. Now it is my turn to deliver a final speech after listening carefully to your nice words with a lot of emotion, confusion, appreciation and love.

I have also made several farewell speeches to smaller audiences since November 2010, given interviews, created a website, organized with several of you a Human Library Conference, drunk many final coffees, enjoyed farewell lunches and dinners. Today I wish to be focused as we should always be at the UN. But focused on what? I thought hard to find something a bit original to say but got lost somewhere. Then I decided not to be too Habitat-centered but rather to be (a bit) UN-centered. As reported recently by HabNews, I am indeed proud to have worked for the UN, to have worked with all of you here and beyond, to have worked for the most noble cause of world peace and human development.

Sometimes we don't realize, as we are overwhelmed by daily tasks that we, the UN secretariat, are in the middle, in the heart of the world community. Listen to the news on BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera , TV5 or CCTV: the UN is mentioned every day. The SG is on your screen, UN reports are issued, conferences organized, humanitarian assistance is provided, human rights are defended, climate change is discussed, slum life is sometimes reported, wars are decided by the SC... the UN is the most important forum which regulates international affairs, the most democratic assembly so far, the indispensable instrument of our planet. With less than 20.000 staff we contribute to the progress of 7 Billion human beings, of course with ups and downs but with a lot of energy and commitment.

I wish to look back at the last 20 years in different regions of the world and show you how our small UN-Habitat has been part of contemporary history.

I start with Asia, 60% of the world population, 50% of the urban population. Asia is an amazing continent who has made a lot of progress since 1990. That year I went to India for a long tour and noted the poverty of many areas but also the dynamism of the people, their resilience. The innovations in the building and housing sector were already very visible. Then I went many times to China in the new millennium, to many different cities. The progress made by China in housing and urban development in a single generation is simply unbelievable. Many of you saw

that in Nanjing 2008 and Shanghai 2010. China and India are leading the emerging economies thanks to their booming cities. They are the best examples of UN-Habitat's argument on cities, engines of economic growth and social development, and have started to address difficult environmental issues.

But Asia has also been a region affected by terrible natural disasters. Remember Kobe 1995, Bam 2003, the tsunami of 2004, the earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan, and two weeks ago the Sendai earthquake and subsequent tsunami. And the recurrent floods in South Asia. We have been present in these countries and have contributed very efficiently to their reconstruction. Our Fukuoka Office has done a wonderful job, also in Afghanistan and Myanmar. It has positioned UN-habitat at the core of the UN recovery machinery, with the support of many bilateral agencies. I have been privileged to visit our teams in the field and I can testify of their fantastic commitment.

Moving to Latin America, I should say that emerging economies such as Mexico and Brazil have also performed beyond expectations. Remember the financial crisis of 1982: Latin America was submerged by debts and dictatorships. Look at the situation now. Poverty still exists but the prospects are much more positive. No wonder, the continent is fully urbanized and city governments are getting stronger and stronger. In March 1996 we organized the first International Forum on Urban Poverty in Recife, predecessor of WUF. It delivered a very powerful message on the respective roles of CSOs and LAs, which was taken further by the City Summit 3 months later, organized in another emerging economy, Turkey. I consider that the Istanbul Conference was a turning point because the Habitat Agenda gave us a complete normative mandate, still valid today. It was a vibrant partnership conference that we should emulate in preparing for Habitat III. Just after the City Summit we established our Rio Office that presently manages a large post-earthquake reconstruction programme in Haiti, which benefits the most vulnerable population of the region.

What about the Arab states, currently at the centre of the world attention? UN-Habitat has been very involved in that region. In the early 90s we designed important programmes in South Lebanon and Somaliland. Then we started our huge Iraq operation, essentially the reconstruction of Kurdistan, in 1997 under the Oil-for-Food programme. Hundreds of staff were recruited to deliver 10 M per month. Such a success that we were able to continue our work after the 2003 invasion. This was not easy but we managed. Congratulations to all colleagues who worked together in this venture. Not forgetting that we have somehow created Dubai Municipality between 1986 and 1996, we have been active recently in Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait, mobilizing Arab funds in all these countries. Arab cities have improved their hardware (infrastructure), now they are trying to improve also their software, i.e. local democracy and

governance. This has been our message for the last 18 years, since we created the Arab Office of the UMP in Cairo and promoted new urban planning approaches all over the world.

And Eastern Europe? I was attending an international conference in Lille when the Berlin Wall fell. We could not believe the first live TV reports. Then the Governing Council of May 1991, held in Harare, saw completely new delegations from that region. They requested our immediate assistance in reviewing their housing conditions and defining new policies. I went to at least 10 countries between 1991 and 1993, from Romania to Hungary, from Bulgaria to Russia, from Warsaw to East Berlin. We provided a lot of policy advices. Only a few of those were followed but the transition went on and we focused on the Balkans, on Serbia and Kosovo. I think that we did a good job despite our small size and limited resources. We even opened a regional office in Warsaw.

In Western Europe we had many contacts as most UN funds are coming from that region. We have had good relations with several countries, recently with Norway and Spain. Before the Netherlands, UK, Sweden and Italy (and before Denmark) have been strong supporters of UN-Habitat. And our presence in Brussels has been very useful to liaise with the EC and the ACP. A key European partner has been the city of Barcelona, host of WUF 2 in 2004 and headquarters of UCLG and Metropolis. Our relations with LA associations must be further strengthened if we want to be an effective UN City Agency. We have followed the political evolution of the EU with great interest, including as a possible model for other regions. At present we need once again to rebuild trust and confidence with EU governments. This is the main challenge of the new Habitat.

And Africa, our region of focus, our priority? In my first years here I was in charge of Francophone Africa, at a time of democratization and National Shelter Strategies. I was a frequent flyer on Ethiopian Airlines, crossing from East to West on a monthly basis. A milestone was the year 1994 and the election of an African hero, Nelson Mandela, as president of South Africa. This was fantastic. And I was honored to attend the 1994 Housing Summit in Botshabelo, which adopted the national Housing Accord. On this basis we developed one of the first UN project in RSA, the basis of the new housing policy. Of course we continued our excellent work in West Africa but were less successful in Central and Eastern Africa. In 1999 we created ROAAS under Alioune's leadership; this was a major step forward. Then we established the HPM programme to be more visible at country level. However we had a hard time in fund raising and our SSA portfolio remains relatively weak. We are moving towards more sub-regional and regional initiatives, hopefully in collaboration with bilateral and multilateral partners.

Finally what about Kenya, our host country? One of the most beautiful country in the world. I have to say a few words on my very happy life here with my wife and my daughters. We really enjoyed Nairobi and the relations with Kenyan friends and UN colleagues. Our daughters

studied very well at Peponi School and ISK and remain Nairobians in their minds, even if they live now in NYC and DC. In my view a turning year here was 1992, not only because our first ED left after 14 years of service but also because that year saw the first democratic elections, the convertibility of the KSh and unfortunately the first carjacking. At UN-Habitat we moved deliberately to urban management and became closer to UNEP at the time of the Rio Conference. The “sustainable development” buzz word started its media invasion and we created the SCP. The word “sustainable” could not find any proper translation in other UN languages but we had to live with it.

Another turning year was 1998, not only for Kenya but for the world with the bomb blast at the US Embassy on 7 August announcing the 9/11 attack in New York and the blast against the UN offices in Baghdad in August 2003. We lost friends in the Nairobi and Baghdad bomb blasts and our country operations became more complicated due to security constraints.

More recently we witnessed with dismay the post-electoral clashes of 2008, fortunately mediated by former SG Kofi Annan. In the meantime Nairobi has grown from 1.25 M in 1988 to 3.7 M now, while its traffic has increased tenfold. And the slums are still the main type of shelter for the urban poor. Following our KENSUP attempt, I understand that a large-scale slum upgrading programme is being designed which may drastically improve the living conditions in several Kenyan cities. We should be ready to contribute expertise and policy advice when this programme materializes.

As you can see from this overview, the work of UN-Habitat is often linked to the general evolution of the world. We are present where history is being made, we are a small part of the headlines, even when we don't notice. This is something that I have appreciated during my UN career, being somehow on the frontline, being a tiny contributor to a changing world. And working with teams, here and in the regions, in offices and in the field, with dedicated colleagues from different cultural origins, from various educational backgrounds, and with many partners who all appreciate the objectivity and intellectual strength of the UN.

Unfortunately I can't acknowledge today all colleagues with whom I had the pleasure to work over the last 23 years. The list will go largely over 100. But I need to recognize at least three of you. First our Master of Ceremony who has been with UN-Habitat for 20 years, starting in Haiti, moving to Lomé, Accra, Abidjan, and Nairobi to create and lead ROAAS. I have named Alioune Badiane, the giant of Africa, the newly appointed Ag. Director of RTCD. Thank you and congratulations Alioune! Second, my Senior PMO, who has been moving back and forth from Latin America to Africa since 1994 and has coached generations of young PMOs and PMAs that all agencies are trying to divert. I have named Liliana Contreras, the manager-in-chief, the determined lady that used to invite me for strategic coffee every morning at 8h30. Thank you Liliana and your team! And finally I cannot omit my closest colleague, who has been sharing my

difficulties and successes since 1993, who has been the most elegant buffer between me and a sometimes hostile environment, who has been the smile of my Division and the calm during all tempests. I have named my beloved Theresa, my golden assistant that has never complained a single time in 17½ years of common life. Thank you Triza!

I wish all of you to work in such a wonderful atmosphere as the one we have developed in RTCD over the last decade. Thanks to my 70 core colleagues and hundreds of field staff who have made this experience so fulfilling!

Finally I wish to mention the support of my family, which was essential to allow me to devote enough energy and creativity to the urban cause. I have already mentioned my twin-daughters who came to Nairobi when they were 6 months old and who, thanks to our international environment, have been able to study in various countries, from Kenya to the USA, from Warwick to Paris and Madrid, from Quito to Beijing. They are UN children, children of the world. And of course I conclude on my most important supporter, my wife Régine, who is well known from many of you. She has accepted my working style, my fascination about cities and bridges, my frequent missions, she has understood my stress and frustrations. She has completely managed our household. What you may not know is that she has also worked for UN-Habitat on several occasions, particularly in representing the agency in the Diplomatic Spouse Association during the last 12 years. Quite a performance. As a result we have enjoyed extremely cordial relations with the Diplomatic Corps in Nairobi, which has been a real plus in my frequent professional contacts with the CPR.

My last speech has been too serious, I know, but this was really my last chance to tell you how much I have enjoyed my work and your friendship. I wish you the very best in the coming years, under the leadership of Dr. Joan Clos. I wish you a very good GC next month and a lot of fun and pride at the heart of the world, at the United Nations.

HUMAN LIBRARY CONFERENCE

CLOSING REMARKS

Daniel Biau
Director, RTCD
17 February 2011

A ROADMAP FOR UN-HABITAT'S TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Dear Colleagues,

I wish to congratulate all of you for a job well done. I congratulate all participants for having shared their wisdom in a very professional way and I thank all staff of UN-HABITAT involved in organizing this meeting for having provided all necessary inputs to set in motion our Human Library.

Usually Expert Group Meetings (EGM) are designed to bring to the secretariat the views and experience of outside experts who are not part of the United Nations. Our Human Library Conference was a very original EGM as it did not bring outsiders but former professionals of UN-HABITAT. It was almost an internal EGM, not really envisaged in our Work-Programme. But I think that this event, probably a first in the entire UN system, achieved a lot. Indeed it achieved more than I expected when we discussed this idea six months ago at our coffee station.

In my closing remarks, I will try to summarize some of the key recommendations which, from my personal point of view, have emerged from our meeting. I will in fact blend this outcome with the recommendations made in recent RTCD retreats, held in July and December 2010 in Nairobi and Naivasha respectively. In that way, I will combine your recommendations as "elders" with our current internal perspective. Following the EGM discussions, I will group the recommendations in clusters corresponding to the panel structure, identifying only three recommendations per panel, with some obvious overlaps.

Before moving to panel 1, a first recommendation would be to establish serious induction seminars for new staff and to organize more structured discussions among professional staff on substantive issues, in the form of periodical workshops.

Under panel 1 (Relations with other UN agencies) we could highlight three lines of action:

- We have the instruments for inter-agency interactions at country level (UNDAFs, UNCTs, HPMs, HCPDs ...) but we need to refine and focus our own contributions to better integrate urban concerns in generic UNDAF priorities (governance, poverty, basic services). We should focus on 26 ENOF priority countries that we selected last year.
- We need to collaborate and to compete with other UN agencies, some with large country offices and more important resources. Professional excellence is therefore indispensable if we want to be heard and respected. We have to strengthen our technical capacities and expertise, globally, regionally and locally, particularly if we want to access "One UN" funds as we already do in some countries.
- We have to work with sister UN agencies but also and primarily with governments, local authorities and other partners active at national level. The partnership principle of Istanbul should remain on top of our agenda. It goes much beyond the UN Country teams.

Under Panel 2 (Relations among UN-HABITAT Divisions) we have noted three practical recommendations:

- UN-Habitat being essentially a mix of global programmes and country activities, we should better coordinate and synergize these two levels of intervention. While the issue is not normative vs. operational, the ENOF action plan should be taken more seriously to ensure real complementarity between global and country-level activities.
- It would be highly advisable to establish more systematically inter-divisional teams (based on the successful precedents of DMU and PSUP) combining the expertise of Focus Area colleagues with the sub-regional knowledge and contacts of our SHSOs.
- A further step ahead should be for Regional Offices to integrate professionals from other Divisions as it is done in UNEP and was tested by the BP programme and the Water Programme in Latin America and SCP in Asia. This would be a way to change the silo culture still persistent in some parts of the agency.

Under Panel 3 (Impact of Technical Cooperation on national policies) we need to recognize our limitations and publicize our successes. I submit three important ideas:

- We know that our current portfolio is rather unpredictable as it prioritizes post natural disasters and in-crisis countries. In the coming years, we have to move deliberately towards providing technical assistance to national policy reforms, in both the housing and urban development areas. This should become our top priority, i.e. normative

support at country level. In fact I propose that RTCD be transformed into the Policy Implementation Division of UN-HABITAT.

- To succeed in this transformation we will have to involve professionals from other Divisions and a variety of partners, including academic and research specialists and local government practitioners. Of course we will also need to rely more and more on national expertise and promote more intense national dialogues (e.g through National Urban Forum).
- We have to take stock of our accumulated experience at country level, probably on a regional basis, and strengthen (again) our own policy expertise. This is a challenge as new recruitments will be needed, based on different staff profiles.

Under Panel 4 (Relations between country operations and global programmes) our collective recommendations were not very innovative:

- We all agreed that monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms have always been underdeveloped at UN-Habitat, especially due to lack of resources. Indeed Regional Offices have to be better equipped to fulfill these tasks if we want them to be more policy-oriented.
- I am also convinced that in our globalized world the regional dimension should take more and more importance. This is another weakness of UN-Habitat as we find it almost impossible to raise funds at regional level. Our Global Programmes and Focus Areas should be more regionalized to be more meaningful. It is primarily at regional and sub-regional levels that policy makers should exchange best practices and policies. The Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF) is an interesting step in that direction.
- From Global Programmes, our Regional and country teams are expecting knowledge and useful tools. We have to insist on the tools needed by national staff in all areas of the Habitat Agenda, from GIS to pricing mechanisms, from community contracting to land use planning. To build capacities, through training or learning-by-doing, simple and effective tools are indispensable.

Under Panel 5 (project and programme administration) the discussions were extremely animated. Many colleagues from PSD attended and were much welcome. Moving beyond our criticism of the increasingly cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, we could make at least three clear proposals:

- Delegated decentralization of authority remains a must, and should be associated with full responsibility and accountability. Despite MTSIP declared intention to promote

'excellence in management' progress in this field has been very slow. To compete with other agencies with field operations such as UNDP and UNOPS we should do what they have been doing for years: delegate much more authority to our regional offices and country teams and exert post-facto controls. This is indeed a cultural issue: we should replace the culture of suspicion with the culture of trust.

- We heard loud and clear that in the UN, only financial rules are cast in stone. The other rules and procedures are agency specific, in our case designed by PSD or OED. Therefore, we could have a lot of flexibility for recruitments and procurement, project approval and reporting, for staff transfers and promotions, etc. We should improve our administrative processes through a proper inter-divisional review.
- Noting that UN-Habitat is top-heavy and that PSD and UNON are overlapping and duplicating in many areas, an immediate option would be to abolish or radically downsize PSD. The functions of PSD could be redistributed to OED (programme and budget), UNON (recruitment, contracts and procurement, staff administration) and substantive divisions (PMOs). PSD staff could be re-deployed accordingly.

Under Panel 6 (Fund mobilization) we appreciated the continuous growth of RTCD budgets mobilized at country level but noted the geographical disparities, with a very successful ROAP contrasting with other less fortunate regions.

- Being a UN agency we have to focus on vulnerable countries and vulnerable people. Therefore, our priority countries fall into two categories:
 - i) The countries in crisis and in post disaster situations, and
 - ii) The Least Developed Countries.

For the former category, we should continue to mobilize donor funds and confirm our reputation as an efficient reconstruction and recovery agency. For the second category, fund raising is more difficult and rather ad-hoc. "One UN" funds are an option to be explored further, but Global Programmes (such as PSUP) are essential. For both types of countries, UN-Habitat should create a Programme Development Facility to provide seed money for project preparation and evaluation.

- In middle-income and emerging economies, we have to be very selective and work essentially with their own funds. This applies in particular to East Asia, the Arab States, Latin America and Eastern Europe. To be attractive, we need to build our credibility and reputation as the UN policy body or think tank on sustainable urban development. This is a huge challenge for UN-Habitat and its new ED.

- Finally we should keep our funding performances under permanent review and have a contingency plan or decline scenario updated in each and every biennium. Since 2003, I have proposed to the CPR and GC a reform in the way Regional Offices are funded in order to transform our ROs into teams of regional advisers and move away from the overhead-generation constraints. As for the 2008 global financial crisis, I think that this reform will only be undertaken when we have no other choice. For the time being we should reinforce our policy expertise and increase the visibility of UN-Habitat at all levels. Fund mobilization cannot succeed without sufficient seniority, substantive knowledge and adequate negotiating skills. This is what we have learnt over the last 25 years.

Dear Colleagues and friends, to conclude, I wish to support a final recommendation related to the continuation of our stock-taking exercise. I am convinced that our 3 day meeting was very useful and could be periodically replicated, probably under different formats and with more interactions with present staff members (the “young generation”). I leave this idea with my successor and with UN-Habitat Management and I shall be happy to join all of you very soon in the Human Library of UN-Habitat. Elaborating on Hampate Ba's famous saying, I would like to suggest that “In Habitat, an active elder is an open human library!”

HabNews – March 2011

Interview of

Daniel Biau

1: History of UN-Habitat

We were born in 1978 at KICC as the (very small) UN Centre for Human Settlements, to be known as Habitat. The phases of Habitat history could be in my view summarized as follows: (i) the foundation during 1978-1985, (ii) the shelter agency from 1986 to 1992, (ii) the Habitat II euphoria during 1993-1996, (iii) the 1997 crisis, (iii) the revitalisation and upgrading during 1998-2002, (iv) the expansion in 2003-2005, (v) the loss of focus and bureaucratization during 2006-2010 and (vi) the future, towards Habitat III, starting now.

2. The milestones

In 1978 creation of UNCHS (with a wrong name in my view), 1987 was the IYSH (an advocacy must) followed by GSS in 1988. In 1992 change of ED, in 1996 Istanbul City Summit (the peak), 1997 confidence crisis, 1998-2002 revitalisation, 2002-05 growth (UN-Habitat + creation of WUF), 2006-2010 bureaucratization. Between 1992 and 2000 there was no stable continuous ED, no full-time USG. This was the second period of UN-Habitat, maybe the most innovative. This is when we introduced poverty, urban governance and disasters as key topics and move beyond shelter per se. UMP, SCP, UEF, IFUP, DMP, indicators, State of Cities: many major initiatives were taken by managers who had the freedom to innovate. The Habitat Agenda was a superb outcome of that period.

3. Three important meetings (76, 96, 2001)

The first Conference on HS was held in 1976 in Vancouver. It brought the slums on the international agenda and created UNCHS. Twenty years later 20.000 people met at the City Summit in Istanbul for two weeks of intense discussions. This Habitat II Conference invented the partnership approach and adopted the Habitat Agenda, focusing on urban development, governance and the role of local authorities. I managed the negotiation of the international cooperation and monitoring chapters and appreciated the constructive spirit of the debates.

In June 2001 the GA held a special session in New York to review the implementation of the Habitat Agenda after 5 years. It was not a big meeting but it adopted an important Declaration on Cities in the New Millennium (see 7 below) and facilitated the elevation of UNCHS to

programme status (see 9 below). Six months later UN-Habitat was born as the UN Programme on Human Settlements. The next big inter-governmental meeting (Habitat III) will take place in 2016. I hope that it will adopt an Urban Agenda as I think that the word "Habitat" is becoming obsolete and is used by too many companies and environmental groups. The word "human settlements" is even more obsolete and should be abandoned if we understand that our present challenge is to promote sustainable urban development for the citizens (not the settlers) or our planet.

After the 2001 Special Session, I established (with several colleagues) the World Urban Forum to keep the spirit of Istanbul alive. The first meeting was held in Nairobi (2002), followed by Barcelona (2004), Vancouver (2006), Nanjing (2008) and Rio (2010). In my view WUF sessions, which bring together 10.000 people from governments, local authorities and other partner groups, are as important in term of substantive progress as the intergovernmental meetings which are centred on the negotiation of resolutions and official declarations.

4. The structure of UNCHS

The initial structure of UNCHS was based on two pillars, the Research Division (RDD) and the Technical Cooperation Division (TCD), the first one funded by the Regular Budget, the second one by overheads derived from country projects. In fact the current structure of UN-Habitat also includes a Research (and Monitoring) Division and RTCD. We have added a Global Division in 1999 to take care of various global programmes, mostly initiated by TCD in the 90s.

It is important to note that RDD before and MRD now are not really undertaking research work, they synthesize research from outside academic partners, for instance for the biennial State of Cities Reports (that I initiated in 1999). UNCHS also had an information division, a bit disconnected from the rest of the Centre, and an administration division. In 1995 I chaired a joint UNEP-Habitat Task Force that merged our administrative division with its UNEP counterpart and created UNON as the sole administration in Nairobi. This was a positive step towards "One UN" and we realized some economy of scale.

5. Successes

In the 80s Habitat was perceived as a shelter agency. It organized well the IYSH and promoted new national shelter strategies in many countries. Unfortunately a number of strategies were only partly implemented, particularly in LDCs. I believe that our Shelter Branch can learn a lot from that time and work out new guidelines.

In the late 80s TCD developed with the World Bank and UNDP an inter-regional programme on urban management (UMP), which remains the flagship global programme in the history of Habitat. UMP lasted 17 years and produced excellent policy papers. It built strong networks in

the developing world and invented, together with the Sustainable Cities Programme, a new type of urban planning, based on city profiles, participatory consultations and City Development Strategies. What we do today on sustainable urban development is essentially a continuation and deepening of that excellent initiative.

In 1994 we created the (inter-divisional) Disaster Management Unit which defined our post-disaster strategy and contributed to make our Technical Cooperation extremely relevant to countries in crisis and countries affected by natural disasters. Another success story of the late 90s was the establishment of our Regional Offices in Latin America (Rio, 1996), Asia (Fukuoka, 1997) and Africa (Nairobi, 1999). They are now the backbone of UN-Habitat.

6. What about your former EDs?

Dr. Arcot Ramachandran recruited me in February 1988. He was meticulous but a bit conservative (focused on shelter, community participation and building techniques). He is the founding father of Habitat. E. Dodeswell (1993) was friendly but had other priorities (UNEP). Wally N'Dow, Secretary General of Habitat II during 94-97, was visionary and excellent in public relations but not an administrator. He (and his team, i.e. ourselves) delivered a fantastic conference in Istanbul. Darshan Johal (97-98) was knowledgeable but temporary. Klaus Toepfer (1998-2000) was an excellent politician who rebuilt the confidence of donors in only 10 months. He started the revitalization with a team of external advisers, and myself as his deputy, and simplified our organigram. We created the Cities Alliance at that time with the World Bank.

7. The Declaration on Cities

I submitted the first draft of the Istanbul+5 Declaration to an EGM held in Vasteras (Sweden) in November 2000, a few weeks after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration which included the "Cities without Slums" target. Then it went through a Prepcom discussion in February 2001 and was finally negotiated and adopted by the GA in June 2001. I think that it was a forward-looking normative document, still entirely valid, which summarizes what needs to be done at all levels to ensure that urbanization is equitable and sustainable. UN-Habitat should monitor it more actively and challenge all governments to keep their promises. The preparation of Habitat III must give us the opportunity of an in-depth review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and of the Declaration on Cities in the New Millennium.

8. The revitalization (July 1998-December 2002)

The "revitalization" started in July 1998 when K. Toepfer was appointed Ag. ED of UNCHS(Habitat). He took me as DED, "OIC of the Centre in his absence". The revitalisation process went in two steps. The first one lasted two years and was a confidence-building exercise. The second step was led by Anna Tibaijuka. It focused on Istanbul+5 (the Special

Session of the GA) and on the regularisation of staff contracts, a difficult undertaking which went smoothly. As a result we became a Programme, had a new structure, launched the WUF and increased the voluntary contributions to UN-Habitat. Both Klaus Toepfer and Anna Tibaijuka should be remembered for leading efficiently the agency during that crucial period.

9. UN-Habitat as a Programme

UN-Habitat became a programme in 2002 as a follow-up to the GA Special Session of June 2001. This elevation in status required a lot of lobbying from the Executive Director. As it had no financial implications, the WEOG finally agreed and the post of ED was subsequently upgraded to USG (as it should have remained since 1992).

The practical impact of this new status was very limited. Maybe the new name (UN-Habitat) attracted more attention and helped in fund-raising. The main advantage was in my opinion to get more respect within the UN family and to be invited to increasing numbers of inter-agency meetings. But there was little impact at country level. RTCD had to continue to raise its own funds.

10. USG Anna Tibaijuka

Anna Tibaijuka started in September 2000. She soon became a good fund raiser but remained too focused on her pet projects (East Africa and later ERSO). She was able to twist the arms of some donors, but sometimes without a clear substantive agenda. She was known for micro-managing human resources. In my view (I was her deputy for 5 years) she tried hard to be a sort of CEO, i.e. to preside over the CPR and the GC, and did not delegate enough to her Directors. In her last years she intensified bureaucratic controls that made our work at country level more complicated. But she increased the global visibility of the agency, particularly thanks to the WUF sessions.

11. Difficult years?

Only 1997 was a very difficult year, because of the financial deficit caused by the success of Habitat II and due to our lack of transparency. Indeed the 90s might have been the most innovative decade of the organization, marked by the launch of excellent global programmes (see 5 above), the beginning of our cooperation with local authorities associations, the establishment of our network of Regional Offices and the rapid expansion of our country activities. Major reconstruction programmes (still ongoing today) took off at that time in several countries in crisis.

12. Meeting our mandate

Our fundamental mandate is to help governments (central and local) in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating housing and urban policies, and to do so from a normative perspective (we are the UN, therefore we must know what is good for the world!). This mandate is not negotiable.

This implies that we work at different levels, from global to local. This is a specificity of UN-HABITAT: to combine global norms, messages and principles with regional adaptations, national politics and local commitments; and to focus on sustainable and equitable development, guided by the poor' needs and dynamics. We are driven by poverty eradication, not only by environmental protection. But there is of course a dialectical relation between these pillars of sustainable development. This focus has not changed in the last 30 years.

Our comparative advantage is not our size (small) or our expertise (insufficient), it is the blue flag, which means objectivity, neutrality and accountability. We cannot be compared to a university or a technical centre. We must know what is going on around the world (language barriers are an obstacle) and promote cross-fertilization. This requires good monitoring, good training, good discussions, good testing, either to build houses or to design a policy. This requires very qualified professionals, more and more difficult to attract to Nairobi and to recruit rapidly. I suggested recently to create a Human Resource Mobilization Unit, to coordinate our constant head-hunting.

13. GC sessions

I was responsible for the organization of four successive sessions of the GC (from 1999 to 2005) and coordinated the substantive part of the Special Session of 2001.

These sessions are of course very important because they allow Member states to interact with the secretariat, to approve our programme of work and to be briefed on the latest thinking on urban issues. I particularly enjoyed the sessions of the Drafting Committees where I represented the secretariat on many occasions. The night sessions on Thursday evenings were usually exciting; you had to be on top of everything to reach a meaningful consensus. Many resolutions were rather symbolic but some were useful and helped strengthen our position, both politically and operationally. We have been able to concentrate the work of the GC on UN-Habitat itself as a UN institution while we brought the substantive discussions and dialogues to the wider WUF audience. Now we have to try and revitalize the CPR, maybe by establishing an Executive Board.

14. Highlights

I already mentioned several highlights of my career at UN-Habitat. Probably the most enjoyable part of my job has been the possibility to go on mission to more than 70 countries in all regions of the world and to advise governments on how to improve the living conditions, how to better manage their cities, how to set up urban institutions, etc. And to work with many colleagues for that purpose, to share ideas and opinions, to agree and disagree, and move forward.

Another good experience has been to organize complex conferences requiring numbers of staff members and to deliver what was planned and sometimes more than we initially expected though an impressive collective effort.

The most difficult part or the least enjoyable part was to deal with the UN bureaucracy that prefers no action at all than any action which could involve the most limited risk. This has worsened in recent years, after the Oil-for-Food investigation.

15. Current challenges

The main challenge is to transform UN-Habitat into the premier centre of excellence on urban development policies, able to advise any interested government (central or local) and to develop the national capacities required to implement policy reforms.

This means strengthening our expertise, focussing on key issues, building strong interdivisional teams, and probably defining a new organigram. At present the structure of UN-Habitat is too fragmented, subdivided in micro-units who don't have the critical mass. We need to revisit this structure and to increase our productivity across the boards.

We also need to reform completely our administration and evolve from a culture of suspicion and redundant controls to a culture of trust and delegation of authority.

This is very possible as demonstrated when we revitalized the agency a decade ago.

16. Miss and forget

What I will miss most are my friends, particularly all staff of my Division – I know that their team spirit cannot be matched – but also many colleagues in other parts of UN-Habitat, in Nairobi and all over the world, with whom I had the opportunity to work, interact, discuss and socialize. I will miss the warm and cordial relations with hundreds of people in dozens of countries, experts, officials, activists, ministers, mayors, builders, managers, women and men, from different cultural backgrounds but united by a common commitment to work for their peoples.

What I wish to forget are the hours wasted in fixing administrative problems, getting proper and fast recruitments, attending boring meetings, listening to sycophants, editing terrible reports ... I guess this was unavoidable, the painful part of my job description. But I would try to forget it as soon as possible.

17. My vision for 2020

I hope UN-Habitat will reform itself soon and expand its policy advisory activities for the benefit of the developing world. I wish a new generation of experts will mature and help the countries of Africa and Asia to advance and accelerate their urban transition. I think that our thematic focus should not change and that we should avoid to follow the latest fashions. Hopefully we will adopt "the City Agency" as our official nickname and work out a good "Urban Agenda" in 2016. I am convinced that cities have been and remain the engines of social and cultural development. They can be better planned and better managed if only there is political will and appropriate expertise. We have a lot to contribute.

18. My final messages

I intend to remain an informal Ambassador of UN-Habitat and its cause. Keep me on your mailing lists, invite me to seminars and farewell parties and have a look at my "Urban Guru" website (danielbiau.webnode.com) if you need more information to consolidate the institutional memory of UN-Habitat.

And above all be proud of working for the United Nations!

UN-HABITAT RTCD CREATIVITY AT WORK

Naivasha Retreat, 6 December 2010

I believe that a best aspect of our job is our continuous creativity. We are never bored. We are creative in our workplace, even if we don't realize how and fail to enjoy fully this fundamental dimension of our lives.

Indeed we are artists! Let me tell you how I see our collective work, and why it is so enjoyable in spite of all odds, bureaucrats, inspectors, auditors, PSD, etc.

1. The first architects were sculptors. Then they became planners. Modern Urban Planning was born as an art in Versailles, Rome, St Petersburg, Washington D.C. As planners we try to "sculpt" the city. But we are not only sculptors and architects. We are artists in many other ways.
2. We are also poets or play writers. An international meeting looks often like a theatre play. With various actors fulfilling their pre-established roles and only limited improvisation and surprises. A drafting committee could be seen as a real play, with expected characters reacting according to their capital texts.
3. We are also painters when we write a nice report or policy guidelines. We amend, modify, correct a number of times the text as the painter does with his work. The perfect product appears slowly, its beauty results from a series of small improvements.
4. We are also musicians as any good speech should be a captivating song. The content matters but the tune and delivery style may matter even more. Some speakers of course can't find the correct tune... We know.
5. We are also dancers or rather choreographers when we organize a team with a role for each one and we deliver a nice ballet such as GC or AMCHUD sessions. Everything fits well, everybody respects the pace, position and timing of this ballet. This is pure beauty.
6. And finally we are film makers (the 7th art) as each country project is a film with the scenario written in the Prodoc, the producers as funding partners, local actors (bad and good), suspense (any budget increase?), tensions (with sister agencies), etc and of course happy ending.

Daniel Biau's Farewell Statements

In conclusion, I hope you are now convinced that our working hours are full of creativity and imagination. This is why we love our jobs in this creative Division where everyone brings ideas to the common pot, where discussion is open and challenges are met without too much suffering and a lot of fun.

I will certainly miss that spirit but will do my best to remain creative.

Imagine all the people... (J. Lennon, British poet and singer).

Mixed but positive Feelings...

A few remarks as farewell to the Cities Alliance Executive Committee

Mexico City, 15 November 2010

I have worked for 30 years in international cooperation on housing and urban development.

I have managed the technical cooperation division of UN-Habitat since 1994, established the network of UN-Habitat Offices around the world, initiated the World Urban Forum, the State of the World's Cities Reports, directed a number of global programmes, guided the drafting of international guidelines and of dozens of reports, co-chaired the Consultative Group during 2001-2004, etc. I joined the UN by political ideal, impressed by its mandate and the respect it gets, committed to bring my humble contribution to the noble cause of the world Peace and Development. At the time of retirement I am still proud and happy to have served the UN but I am looking backward with mixed feelings.

After joining UN-Habitat I realized quickly that the urban agenda was too broad to be an international priority. This explains why during the last decades, the United Nations system has tried to give it some focus and to link it to clearer or simpler priorities such as sustainable development, democratic governance or poverty eradication. This has not worked very well in terms of resource mobilization and overall visibility. But it has allowed better understanding of the on-going urban transition, to identify and highlight local policy options and to advise a number of governments on the best ways and means to develop and implement housing and urban strategies.

In fact the urbanization process of the developing world has been less chaotic than forecasted by the media. Many countries are managing their urban development relatively well, particularly in Asia, the Arab States and Latin America. Ideas and good practices have been shared, adapted and successfully applied in a number of emerging economies. Of course many other countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), are lagging behind and are unable to address the slum crisis. But the urbanization of our planet should not be seen as an outright disaster. It has both positive and negative features. The United Nations has usually stressed the negative to raise awareness while not placing enough emphasis on the positive role of cities, including their impact on rural development.

We need to address this imbalance and to adopt a comprehensive and objective point of view. I have described in various articles the major milestones of the international urban debate over the last 35 years, from the viewpoint of a UN manager and expert who has been personally involved in many stages of this journey.

We all know that the Urban Agenda covers by essence a cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary field, and has to be related to many aspects of the economic, social, environmental, cultural and political life. It has to provide the territorial or spatial dimensions of a number of societal challenges that the UN system tries to bring together at the global level, in an often scattered but consensual manner. This might be the weakness of the urban agenda: because it is too broad it cannot stand on its own and needs to be subsumed under - or associated with - more popular and fashionable topics (such as climate change). But then it loses its explanatory power, its comprehensiveness, its political value. Therefore urban specialists have no choice but to continue the struggle and frequently restructure this agenda in various ways to reach the world leaders.

I have followed these periodical changes in the urban discourse with some cynicism; I have even contributed to formulate that discourse. I have seen physical projects replacing institution-building in the 70s, then urban management replacing projects in the 80s, then the birth of the governance paradigm, the increasing emphasis on local authorities, the abandon of the noble cause of shelter for all and its resurrection in the anti-slum MDG 7, the death of traditional urban planning and the appearance of CDS at the turn of the century, the continuous divorce between experts advocating participatory and incremental upgrading and politicians adept of slum eradication, the recent revival of climate change and green energy concerns, the permanent and rather fruitless search for simple monitoring indicators, the gender equality credo and its subsidiary debate on mainstreaming vs. direct women empowerment, the youth bulge vs. ageing societies, and last but not least the unbelievably persistent question on how to stop (for good!) rural-to-urban migrations.

At the City Summit (Istanbul, June 1996) governments argued about urban governance concepts and later refused that UN-Habitat be called "the City Agency". They did not understand what was underway. Now they have moved forward. They have agreed that they must decentralize powers and resources to local authorities. Many cities have adopted the City Development Strategy approach, sometimes without calling it CDS but by implementing participation and partnership principles as key ingredients of renewed urban planning. Very few have upgraded the urban slums but many, particularly in Asia, have improved the material lives of slum-dwellers by relocating them in the suburbs. Goal 7/11 has been met in only 5 years, instead of 20. Of course it was very un-ambitious but we (UN-Habitat and its Cities Alliance partners) are now goalless, orphans of the MDGs. Indeed slums remain a major problem in only two sub-regions, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The rest of the developing world has progressed slowly but steadily and cities are better in spite of their tremendous growth. The urban population of the developing world increased from 1.35 B in 1988 to 1.97 in 2000 and 2.6

B in 2010. However cities have been able to cope and to become effective engines of development in most regions of the planet.

My interrogation is the following: what role did we - international agencies active within UN-Habitat field of expertise and particularly CA members - play in this positive evolution? How did we help or influence the urban transition? We implemented many projects but they were mostly drops in the enormous bucket of urban initiatives. They were useful but with little quantitative impact, they did not address the magnitude of the needs.

I believe that our influence has been essentially political and ideological. Ministers came to Nairobi and to other meeting places and heard experts repeating the same messages over and over again. In their countries our local experts adapted the same messages to the specific situations. Reports, guidelines, films, websites, pamphlets, articles, informal discussions, site visits, resulted in an overall change of mindset towards housing and urban issues. Country projects were seen as demonstrations of new approaches, not as ends in themselves. They gave us the required credibility and allowed our recommendations to be taken seriously, not always followed but always kept in mind as references. We have been an implicit think tank rooted in country realities, not a research network but a "policy-making organ" as so nicely characterized by the UN jargon. I am convinced that we have played a progressive role by spreading and testing valuable ideas and concepts which were just a step ahead of standard policies and helped in due course politicians to respond better to the needs and expectations of their peoples. We have probably contributed to realize the ambitions of the UN Charter by linking and bridging "We, the peoples" and "We, the governments" in our area of work.

There is room for optimism but certainly not for complacency. Still millions of people live in abject poverty, still corruption is widespread, still wars, violence and disasters destroy human lives and settlements, still the urban environment is badly polluted, still social inequalities divide our agglomerations in ghettos, still international cooperation is under-funded... The combat for better cities and better life must therefore go on. It will remain on my agenda.

I wish the Cities Alliance more success and thank you for listening to my soul searching.