

Aide Memoire

High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization

16-18 December 2013, Yangzhou, China

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Sustainable Development (DSD/DESA), in collaboration with the Municipal Government of Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, the People's Republic of China, will organize a High-level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization, in Yangzhou, China, on 16-18 December 2013.

Background

Cities face multiple challenges. In developing countries, it is estimated that one billion people live in urban slums. They often lack basic social services, such as health care, education, and their neighbourhoods are often without safe drinking water supplies, basic sanitation or public transport.

Globally, cities are fast becoming sources of growing environmental degradation. An estimated 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions come from cities and more than 70 per cent of energy is consumed in urban areas. This places cities at the forefront of the climate change agenda. In both developed and developing countries, cities are also responsible for increased water consumption, air pollution, congestion and wastes. Looking ahead, some 70 per cent of the world's population will live in cities by 2050, with the urbanization occurring largely in developing countries, compounding their urban development challenges.

These challenges notwithstanding, cities are often centres of commerce, education and scientific and technological innovations, driving economic growth, creating jobs, and enriching our social and cultural fabric. Promoting sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization will therefore be essential to poverty reduction and to a sustainable future.

At the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders recognized the importance of sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization. They reaffirmed that cities, if well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies. In this regard, they recognized the need for a holistic approach to urban development and human settlements that provides for affordable housing and infrastructure and prioritizes slum upgrading and urban regeneration mobility. They further recognized the need for conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of cities, as well as the importance of the revitalization of historic districts and the rehabilitation of city centres.

At Rio, world leaders further committed themselves to promoting sustainable development policies that support inclusive housing and social services; a safe and healthy living environment for all; affordable and sustainable transport and energy; promotion, protection and restoration of safe and green urban spaces; safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; healthy air quality; generation of decent jobs; and improved urban planning and slum upgrading. They underlined the importance of considering disaster risk reduction, resilience and climate risks in urban planning and the efforts of cities to balance development with rural regions.

Objectives

The purpose of the High-Level Symposium on Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urbanization is to assist urban planners, mayors and decision-makers in developing countries in improving decision-making in urban planning and in moving toward sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization. It will facilitate frank and open high-level discussions on challenges and successes in advancing sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization. Specifically, it will offer to all participants a platform for sharing experiences and best practices in economic transformation of cities; in investing in urban infrastructure; in advancing science, technology, and innovation for sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization; in protecting and conserving cultural heritages of cities; and in promoting dynamic rural-urban economies. Participants will also be invited to discuss how to implement integrated policy measures in the areas of housing, slum upgrading, affordable and sustainable transport and energy; safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; and job creation, among others.

Participants

It is expected that the symposium will be attended by some 200 participants from around the world. This will include urban planners, mayors and other decision-makers from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, as well as representatives from developed countries, leading international experts, representatives from the UN agencies, Major Groups and other stakeholders.

Venue and dates

The High-Level Symposium will be held in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, China, on 16-18 December 2013.

Expected outputs

A report containing a summary of main findings and recommendations of the symposium, proceedings of plenary and thematic sessions, as well as expert presentations, will be issued after the Symposium. The outcome will be posted on relevant United Nations websites on sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization. It will feed into the Open Working Group on SDGs and the work of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In addition, a report will also be prepared after the Symposium that will include guidelines on sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization, based on the thematic discussions of the Symposium.