Conference on Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age, Role of Infrastructure
13 May 2009, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Background

The Conference on Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age, Role of Infrastructure seeks to address the global challenges posed by rapid urbanization and the impact of global warming on both the man-made and natural environments - from poverty and inequality to natural and manmade disasters - by calling for better sustainable planning for urban growth. Global warming and climate change pose serious threats to all nations in the 21st Century, as rapid urban population growth is particularly affecting developing countries.

Nearly 60 million new people are added to the urban population annually in the developing countries. Currently, Africa has the lowest urbanization level but the fastest urban population growth. Asia’s prospects are especially daunting, given the anticipated rapid population increases and demands for energy and raw materials.

In 2000, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which commit the Member States of the United Nations to improving the living conditions for the 2.5 billion poor in the world. Millennium Development Goal 7 aims to ensure environmental sustainability by integrating the principles of sustainable development into Member States’ policies and programmes.

Sustainable urban design and architecture are key considerations in environmental planning and management that seek to improve living conditions while preventing inequity and exclusion. However, even in developed countries, such sustainable approaches are new. The development of appropriate ideas, methods and clean energy technologies needs to be tested and applied. No global panaceas exist but many approaches can be productively adapted from one location to another.

To solve problems not only related to climate change but to resuscitate economy public works construction programmes and infrastructure projects are seen as solutions to create jobs. President Obama wants to create new era jobs in the area of information, communication and technology and green jobs for energy conservation and global warming emissions to stimulate economy.

The “Forum on Sustainable Urbanization in the Information Age – Towards Sustainable Infrastructure Development” seeks to provide a forum for sharing best practices among countries and cities on the use of infrastructure in achieving sustainable development in urban areas. It aims to provide the venue for dialogue and exchange of experiences on improving capacities of cities and local governments for planning, implementation and management of infrastructure networks, not only in physical planning but for healthcare and education, which are critical for a sustainable future. It will look, specifically, into issues of infrastructure as a strategic area for augmenting capacity and enhancing effectiveness of cities and urban areas for
sustainable development and promoting a fulfilling life for millions of people. The role of soft infrastructure especially health infrastructure will also be emphasized.

This conference is the second in a series of UN-AIA-RPA sponsored conferences on sustainability in the information age. The first conference, held in New York in spring 2008, brought together professionals, academics, policy makers and politicians from both the executive and legislative branch. Around the globe, the realization that resources are finite is starting to sink in. The projects proffered by 12 global cities ranged from the audacious to the mundane – however all solutions addressed the issue of what should be done to improve the environmental impact of cities. The presentations also focused on how to muster the political will to turn plans into reality. This highly successful first conference demonstrated that human ingenuity combined with political will could effectively address complex global problems.

The second Conference in the series will be held in New York City during the Commission on Sustainable Development on 13 May 2009, at the United Nations Headquarters.

**Sponsors and partners**

The conference is to be jointly sponsored by the UN-HABITAT, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, the Global Alliance for ICT and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA-GAID, the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter, the Regional Plan Association, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Forum For Urban Design.

Partners include the Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA,) International Tunnelling Association (ITA), and NJIT School of Architecture,

The Conference will analyze the role of infrastructure and infrastructure in health in reference to the High Level Segment of ECOSOC to be held in July 2009 in achieving sustainable urbanization and the use information and communication technologies (ICT).

**Objectives**

The conference goals are as follows:

(i) bring together mayors and representatives of global cities, who show leadership in sustainable urban and regional planning, to talk about their challenges for sustainable growth and renewal by 2030;

(ii) discuss practical solutions, share best practices in achieving sustainable design in urban areas and megacities and their hinterlands, and discuss deliverables for planning for smart growth;

(iii) share knowledge to bridge the digital divide in the area of sustainable urban design and planning, as well as innovative ICT models for sustainable urban planning;
(iv) elucidate the political means by which sustainable development and protection of the natural environment is possible; and
(v) bring together representatives from the private sector, including infrastructure specialists, to discuss their contribution to sustainability

The conference will invite representatives of Member States, local authorities, policy makers, developers, architects, engineers, planners, designers, members of civil society, media, ICT experts, and the private sector to engage in a policy dialogue, with the aim of establishing a sustainable environment worldwide.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the conference will be the following:

- create a knowledge base leading to technical support of projects all over the world using ICTs
- analyze the approach of significant cities, representing different regions and how they address sustainable urban development;
- demonstrate best practices and lessons learned from these cities in the use of infrastructure and ICTs to achieve sustainability;
- create awareness on the role of ICT in the area of sustainable engineering, architecture, and urban planning in a globalizing world; (health infrastructure, transportation, energy systems, water systems)
- increase universal awareness and involvement in Millennium Declaration values and respect for nature and the Millennium Development Goal 7;
- encourage dialogue among representatives of different countries, regions, professions and those who have different expertise in the areas of policy-making, architecture, urban planning, engineering and transportation; and
- establish new relationships between those involved in ICT, sustainable architecture, urban and regional planning and infrastructure.

Audience

The conference will bring together international and local stakeholders responsible for policy making and city planning in metropolitan areas for this dialogue concerning the challenges climate change poses to sustainable urbanization. The objective of the conference is to look at practical political and physical design approaches with which to foster sustainable development in urban areas and the role of infrastructure and ICTs in achieving the goals of smart growth. This will be an event related to the Commission of Sustainable Development therefore will be open to all the delegations and around 50 ministers attending to this event.

The information resulting from this meeting will be published as a book to be distributed as a United Nations publication. The communications surrounding the event will include a blog and a wiki on the UNDESA-GAID website, which will also distribute information on the meeting.
The conference will take full advantage of available information and Communication technologies, allowing the public to listen in and contribute their opinions and ideas simultaneously and virtually. The discussions will be webcast live on the internet and included in interactive chat rooms. A blog and website will be set up to feature background information and guide questions, stimulating discussions around the themes of the meeting.

**Conference Format**

The conference will start with a Plenary Session at the ECOSOC Chamber (capacity 500 people) featuring keynote speaker Ms. Anna K. Tibaijuka, Director-General, UN Habitat following welcoming remarks by Mr. Sha Zukang, USG, UN-DESA followed by 2 panels with presentations from 6 metropolitan areas, New York (North Megaregional Initiative, East Corridor Developments (USA) and representatives Jakarta, Indonesia, Melbourne (Australia), Cape Town (South Africa), Curitiba (Brazil), Teubingen (Germany). There will be a luncheon featuring short speeches by some industry leaders.

The meeting will end at 5:30 pm and will resume with the 21st Century Park and the Contemporary City Conference, organized together with the Forum for Urban Design.

There will be a dinner on 13 May and a reception on 14 May hosted by the Forum for Urban Design.

The Forum for Urban Design will host two panels comprising leading figures from to discuss different visions for the 21st century urban park. Discussions will range from the ways in which innovative and creative designs are redefining the park of the 21st century and the contemporary city, to questions about development strategy, financing, operations and management. The first evening will feature three prominent landscape architects, James Corner, George Hargreaves and Michael van Valkenburgh, who will discuss the ways in which innovative and creative designs are redefining the park of the 21st century and the contemporary city. The second evening will bring three leaders to the table – John Campbell from Waterfront Toronto, David Karem from Louisville and Alex Garvin of Alex Garvin Associates – who will each address questions about development strategy, implementation, financing and why parks are so fundamental to their visions for the future city. At the Museum of Modern Art, Celeste Bartos Theater (Education and Research Center, 4 W. 54th Street) on 13 May and 14 May at 6:30 PM.