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United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – plans under way

In announcing the formal commencement of planning for the United Nations Conference/Exposition on Human Settlements to be held in Vancouver, British Columbia from May 31 to June 11, 1976, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, described some of the background of the meeting and stated Canada's intention of being an effective host "to this critically important international conference" as well as playing "a leading role as a participant".

Passages from Mr. Sharp's statement follow:

* * * *

The urgency and need to examine human-settlements problems derives in the first instance from a global trend of crisis proportions towards urbanization, taking place in both developed and developing countries. Thus the world population has been forecast to reach a total of 6.5 billion within the next three decades. Urban settlements are growing twice as fast as the population. The big cities of over half a million are growing twice as fast again. By the year 2000, for the first time in history, more people will be urban than rural. United Nations forecasts suggest that in developing countries the number living in urban settlements will grow threefold to 1.4 billion by the year 2000. Major movements of populations of such dimensions, already under way, are overtaking the ability of governments to provide housing, public services and facilities. They are creating many serious social, economic and human problems which most governments at this point in time are not equipped to overcome.

At the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972, it became apparent that a global international initiative was needed to help countries meet the mounting human-settlements problems and to focus public attention thereon. The original proposal for the conference/exposition made in Stockholm by Victor Goldbloom, Quebec Minister for Municipal Affairs and the Environment, was enthusiastically endorsed by the international community. The resultant Stockholm recommendations relating to human settlements and in particular to the conference/exposition have since received first priority within the con-

text of the United Nations environment program. After deciding at its twenty-seventh session to hold the conference and accepting Canada's offer to host it, the United Nations General Assembly last December adopted in plenary without opposition a resolution detailing the plans for the conference, its venue, and making available resources from the regular budget to proceed with the preparatory process. A preparatory committee of up to 58 member states has also been established to refine the conference agenda and provide advice on complex arrangements and consultations at the regional and international level. International organizations within and outside the United Nations family have been invited to participate in the preparations so as to be able to share in the results of the conference/exposition and action following thereon.

Conference themes

The broad themes of the conference were developed last May at a United Nations seminar, chaired by Barbara Ward, in Vancouver and attended by experts from 22 countries. The themes which have been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly include:

- (1) broad areas of human needs in the environment of human settlements;
- (2) the role of settlements in national development;
- (3) the structure and quality of the environment of human settlements;
- (4) special problems in human settlements;
- (5) managing human settlements;
- (6) international co-operation.

The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Program at its