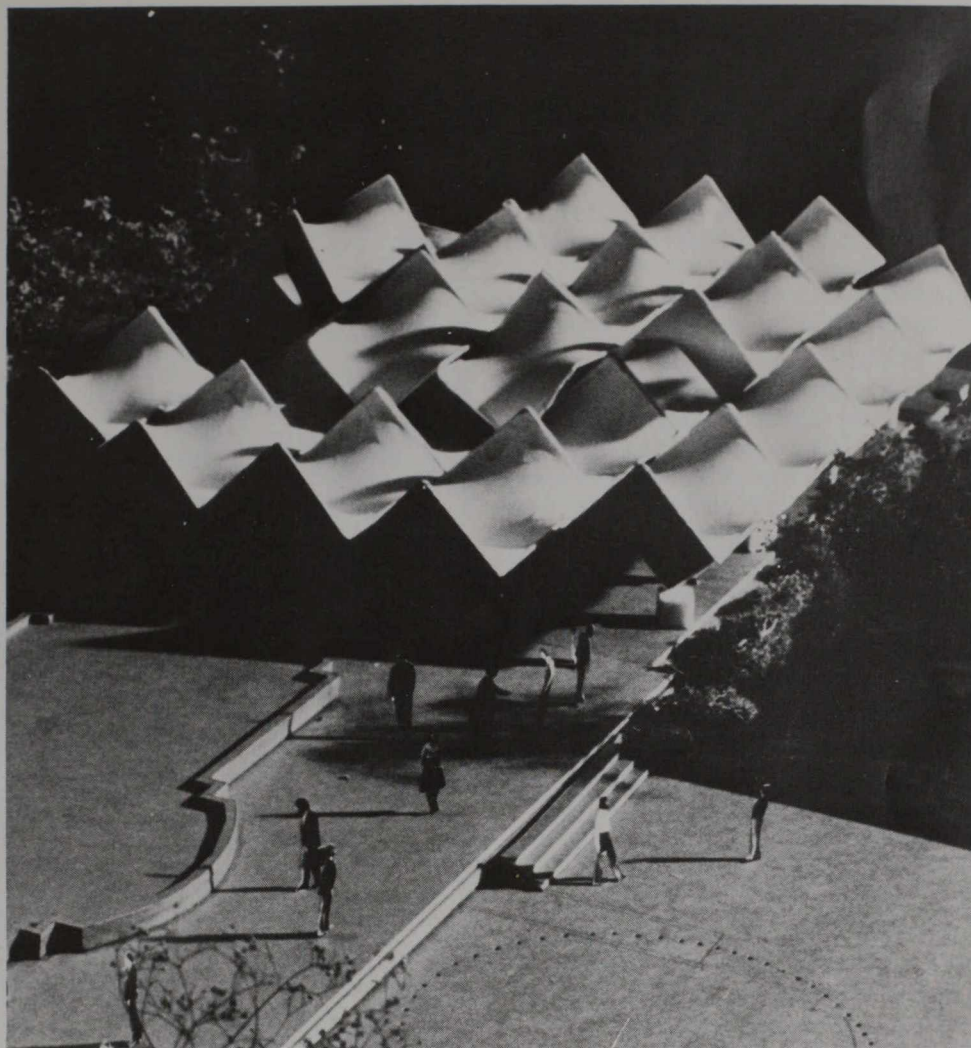


Solutions can be found

"No human need is more basic than shelter. Yet no country can claim that it provides adequate shelter to all its people. Nor can any country claim to protect its people from the consequences of inadequate shelter, impure water, congested transportation systems, primitive processes of waste disposal, the pressures which come from crowding, from noise, from fumes. In urban and rural communities alike men, women and children suffer as a result. Solutions to these human problems are available. That is why we in Canada have offered to host the Habitat Conference, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver. Habitat brings various solutions together offering governments the opportunity to share their knowledge. It offers human beings everywhere the pledge of fresh approaches and fresh pursuits. It holds out to everyone the promise of a planet that can yet be a wholesome human habitat."

*Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau,
broadcast on February 29, 1976.*



The Habitat Pavilion, main information centre of the conference, is a purpose-built, modular structure with a papier mache roof. Designed by Erik Erikson Architects, it was partially constructed by 2,000 school children in the Vancouver area. The underside of the roof shells is decorated by children in keeping with the theme of human settlements.

nations and the world community be most effective in their support? How can effective government be provided for settlements that are exploding at their seams? And how to prevent prime agricultural land from going under to urbanisation — not only in the third world, but around the cities in developed countries?

One way the organizers of the conference hope to ensure real progress and avoid the danger endemic to conferences of getting bogged down in generalities and good intentions too vaguely directed, is by homing in on a few basic issues which are widely recognised as being of essential importance.

This point was made effectively by Barney J. Danson, Canadian Minister of State for Urban Affairs, addressing the preparatory committee for Habitat in January of this year. While recognising that Habitat could not guarantee happiness to every individual, he suggested that the participating countries could devise reasonable targets for "the reduction of reducible suffering and the elimination of unnecessary misery."

Focus on water

He went on: "Among the basic areas of need for people in settlements, I would like to say a word about water. This is, I think, together with food, the most basic of the needs of people living in settlements.

Access to safe water, provided in whatever manner the resources of each nation and community allow, is, in a very profound way, the keystone to any national strategy on human settlements.

"In my own country, I have seen what a beneficial effect national programmes to provide water and sewer systems to communities have had over the years on the quality of life. Such seemingly modest programmes have transformed life in hundreds of villages and agricultural communities throughout Canada, making them more attractive and livable places and releasing valuable human energy previously devoted to carrying water.

"The provision of safe drinking water in every definable community by the year 2000 might seem to be a very modest goal for a human settlements conference to deliberate upon and, hopefully, endorse. Modest though it may appear, we should remind ourselves how far short the world still is of realising the goal of the World Health Organization; namely that 'piped water should be available in all premises of a community' . . . When we focus on the most crucial needs of the under privileged, we quickly find that before we can do much of anything else, we have to have safe water."

Another basic issue which is likely to come up for discussion and to prove rather more touchy and controversial than water

is the question of disparities — not just the disparity between the consumption of rich countries and poor countries, which is frequently aired with the poor countries justly demanding a larger share of the cake. The other disparity which is less publicised, but which Jim MacNeill emphasized in his Rotary Club speech, is "the enormous gap inside many Third World countries between the poverty of the mass of people and the immense wealth and privilege of their tiny ruling classes."

Privilege in poor countries

These ruling classes "control nearly all of the wealth, own most of the land, and appear as reluctant to give up any of their privileges at home as they are vigorous in demanding them abroad."

Mr. MacNeill commented: "We still have far too many disparities within our own country. But they are nothing compared to those in some Third World countries, many of whose worst problems could already be solved if those holding the power were only willing to provide a just distribution of available income."

Habitat is the sixth United Nations Conference to be held in this decade on the problems of what Marshall McLuhan has called "the global village". The first was the Environment Conference, held in