

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 19, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

ANNOUNCEMENT OF HOLDING OF UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION AT VANCOUVER IN JUNE, 1976

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, last June I reported that Canada had extended an invitation to the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm to host a major United Nations Conference and Exposition on Human Settlements. This invitation was very well received by the United Nations and it has been agreed to stage the conference-exposition in Vancouver. I am pleased to report that the province of British Columbia and the city of Vancouver have agreed to accommodate and support this major world forum as host province and host city. It will be the largest international conference ever held in Canada, bringing between 4,000 and 5,000 participants from 130 countries.

Originally the General Assembly had agreed that the conference exposition should be in 1975. At the request of the United Nations, they have obtained agreement of member states to shift the date to June, 1976.

The conference-exposition will be the first United Nations meeting devoted exclusively to the subject of human settlements and human habitation. Instead of identifying problems and determining directions for future research, the point will be to present, in various forms, answers that have been found. Policies will be discussed; resolutions for action will be proposed. But, most important, will be the demonstration of solutions. Much of the action will be in the form of demonstration projects. Some of these will have a national focus; others will have regional significance; and those of more universal interest will be exhibited in Vancouver. Canadian demonstration projects will be especially important since conference participants will be able to see them, both before and after the meetings take place, at different locations across the country.

The provinces have been consulted on this matter since our initiative in Stockholm last June and we will be working in close co-operation with them in preparing for the conference and in selecting Canadian demonstration projects. I have sent letters to all the provincial premiers, inviting them to designate a minister and officials to join us in planning Canada's participation.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that all Canadians will enthusiastically support this major effort to confront these important issues that affect all of mankind.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I received the outline of the minister's comments just as I entered the House. I think it is very appropriate that this announcement should be made by the minister today when the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities is meeting in Ottawa. No one can disagree with the efforts of all countries of the world to face the question of proper settlement and planning for the future.

It is an excellent idea that this United Nations Conference on Human Settlements should meet in Canada, particularly in Vancouver in that setting which speaks for itself so far as the environment is concerned. Those in this House who are concerned welcome the statement by the minister that the conference is to take place in Canada. As a nation with a particularly large land mass and with particularly crowded settlements lying close to the American border, the questions of settlement, planning and population redirection are important to us as they are to all nations of the world.

I am glad that the minister has sent letters to the provincial premiers so that joint planning can take place with regard to participation in the conference. I would hope, too, that the minister might see fit to involve all the urban centres and municipalities in some of the planning for the conference. It has been the lack of their participation in the past that has so seriously limited the scope of national policies in reference to urban affairs and housing.

I hope the minister will use the coincidence of his announcement today, and the meeting of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities in Ottawa to consider further municipal participation. I say, as I have said before, that at this stage of our development there should be a particular agenda whereby the municipalities can meet with the federal government and the provinces not as observers but as spokesmen to set out the problems they face. As I pointed out last week, only 4 per cent of wage earners in certain urban centres of Canada can afford to buy new homes, and if you take into account the whole nation the figure is an estimated 10 per cent. I hope that by the time the conference meets that figure will have improved. If it should go the other way, we will reach the point where very few wage earners in Canada will be able to afford a new home in our urban centres. I trust I have been brief enough, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, our group welcomes the statement by the minister that the United Nations Conference and Exposition on Human Settlements will be held in the city of Vancouver in 1976. A conference of this type is long overdue. For a number of years, environmental groups, groups interested in hous-