

Canada Weekly

Volume 3, No. 20

May 14, 1975



Ottawa, Canada.

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Problems of human settlements – their size, form and quality

Addressing a joint meeting in London, England, on April 11, of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Human Ecology Council, Canada's Minister of State for Urban Affairs, Barney Danson, observed that the Commonwealth had "proved that effective relationships founded on very broadly defined goals can be lasting" and that it was "a model for others to follow" at a time when the world was "in need of models of this kind". He mentioned as among the critical issues that would affect mankind during the balance of the present century "the population explosion, the food problem, energy supply and distribution, resource limits, environmental pollution", all of which had already been the subjects of "special and urgent meetings over the past few years – meetings within nations, meetings at the regional level in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa, and meetings at the global level through the United Nations". He discerned "one critical issue that provides a link between all of these and a vital (if partial) key to their resolution" – the issue of "human settlements", their "shape and form and quality...but, most especially, the accelerating rate of urbanization and the concentration of population into a small number of very large metropolitan and megalopolitan regions".

A major effort to deal with the problems of human settlements, Mr. Danson pointed out, would be the "Habitat" conference scheduled to be held in Vancouver in June 1976. His discussion follows of the aspects of these problems that would be studied and debated at Vancouver, and of the results that were hoped for from this conference:

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At "Habitat" the nations of the world will consider and, we hope, adopt and undertake a wide range of needed international and national actions on the global problems of human settlements. This is urgently required. The changes occurring in our cities and towns and throughout our rural areas are happening at such a rate that we often don't perceive their aggregate effect; within only 25 years the terms of reference and, in many ways, the character and prospects of the human community will have changed fundamentally. Man will be living for the first time on a predominantly urban planet. If our demographic projections prove correct, three-and-a-half billion of the world's citizens – out of a likely six-and-a-half billion – will be in settlements of more than 20,000 people by the turn of the century. These settlements will be growing at twice the general rate of population growth. The cities of over two to three million may well be grow-

ing twice as fast again. The dimensions of such growth are astounding. It means building as much man-made environment in 25 years as we have in the entire history of man.

Rich, developed countries in North America and Europe may be able to cope with a doubling of their urban environment in 25 years. We probably have, in fact, the resources, financial and technical, to transform this rapid change into an unparalleled opportunity – an opportunity to create communities that are more conserving of energy and other resources, that are more harmonious with the natural environment, that are more human in scale and thus more livable. If we are to transform this from a crisis to an opportunity, however, we must institute measures that will enable us to manage this growth and change. Canada and other developed countries will need to develop and apply a whole range of new approaches in urban policy and