

## Maintaining the momentum of Habitat

*Defence Minister Barney Danson, formerly Minister of State for Urban Affairs, who served as president of Habitat, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in Vancouver last June, reviewed some of the action taken by nations since the conference in an address to the Second Economic Committee of the UN General Assembly in New York, October 25.*

*Mr. Danson urged the adoption of resolutions that would help implement the benefits of Habitat so that "the advances we have made...not be left to wither on the vines of indifference". Excerpts from the Minister's speech follow:*

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Habitat was a catalyst for discussion and decision-making on both an international and national level. It followed in the best traditions of this body and dealt with an area of basic concern to every member of this United Nations. Now, however, we are faced with the problem of how best to implement and utilize the benefits of Habitat. It is my earnest wish that the advances we have made should not be left to wither on the vines of indifference.

The nations of the world must individually and collectively develop effective programs to improve the human condition. Like the members of a far flung family we must rally in mutual support, lending each other both the benefits of our individual experiences and the strength that always accompanies the recognition of bonds of the heart.

We can look with satisfaction on the quiet response of the regional economic commissions of Europe and Latin America, which have already convened meetings to discuss Habitat follow-up action and have advanced proposals for regional co-operation on human settlement problems. We look forward to similar meetings in the other regions and to other world conferences which will deal with issues raised at Habitat.

The UN World Water Conference to be held in Argentina in March is a prime example. As you know, it will give effective consideration to the problems of potable water. If it can develop an international program ensuring drinkable water in all communities of the world by 1990, it will be an important step in achieving this objective established by governments at Habitat.

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But how best to implement the lessons learned at Habitat?

Shortly, a proposed general resolu-

tion on the report of the Habitat Conference will be tabled in this committee. We very much hope that this general resolution will be adopted by member states in the spirit of consensus which we believe is appropriate to a text concerned with human problems of the dimension of those discussed at Habitat. This general resolution has been drafted with such a consensus in mind.

### Audio-visual information centre

A draft resolution on post-Habitat use of audio-visual material will also be tabled later. As you know, the audio-visual program was a unique and important part of the preparations and proceedings of the conference. We are indebted to the UN environment program for the support it gave to the audio-visual program and indeed for its support for and contribution to the conference as a whole. At the conference, all countries agreed that the extensive audio-visual material represented an invaluable resource for education, training and public information on human settlements, and that steps should be taken to ensure their continued and active use after the conference. The resolution to be tabled will propose the establishment of a UN audio-visual information centre to serve these purposes.

On the institutional question, as has been the case for previous conferences, the institutional follow-up to Habitat should reasonably be the subject of a separate resolution. There was detailed and thorough discussion at Vancouver on the question of global and regional mechanisms and institutions for human settlements. These discussions yielded a draft resolution which provides in our view an excellent framework for a decision at this session of the General Assembly on

the two remaining questions in Section X of the draft, the questions of institutional link and location of the unit. It is important that a decision be taken on these two questions at this session.

### International committee

The momentum of Habitat must be maintained. It should not be allowed to slow. This resolution provides a way for the UN to respond to these human problems. A decision is also needed to demonstrate to those living in human settlements around the world that we are able and willing to respond quickly and effectively to their needs and concerns. Too often in the past, we have been accused as nations of failing to unite and to respond effectively to urgent needs. In the view of my Government, there is a need now for a strong and representative inter-governmental committee at the global level, served by a small but effective secretariat, and improved intergovernmental and secretariat arrangements at the regional level.

During this session we must demonstrate to those millions of men, women and children whose lives will be dramatically affected by this resolution that we, as a world community, are both able and willing, to respond to their needs, their concerns, their pleas for help. There is nothing lonelier, there is nothing to fire bitterness more or to encourage withdrawal from the common community of man than an ignored call for help. On behalf of those who make this call, I urge you, to act on this resolution and its spirit.

In conclusion, I can only stress once again the importance of the work initiated at Habitat. Human settlements contain not only the problems of the world, often reflected through the magnifying effects of concentrated population, but also the solutions to these problems.

Like a doctor seeking out the causes of disease we must continue to identify the symptoms of human settlement problems in the hope of finding a way to deal with the true cause of our collective maladies. Along the way we will attempt to treat those symptoms, providing temporary relief, but we must never lose sight of our original goal – to cure the illness. The world that we inherited – our sometimes shabby patrimony – is not entirely of our