Third United Nations Conference on the
 Least Developed Countries
Brussels, Belgium, 14-20 May 2001

Parallel event

MEETING OF MAYORS

Summary prepared by the Conference secretariat

1. The event assembled Mayors from around the world. They met in Brussels (Belgium) at the European Parliament on 15 and 16 May 2001 to discuss city-to-city cooperation. The Meeting of Mayors was organized jointly by UNCTAD, UNDP and Habitat with the collaboration of WACAP and the city of Brussels. The event was conducted to promote and develop cooperation between LDC cities and other developing or industrialized cities. LDC III provided an exceptional forum and an opportunity for participating Governments and international organizations to support city-to-city cooperation.

2. The Executive Secretary for LDC III set the stage for the event by stressing the need for tangible cooperation, not just signposts at the entrance of cities saying, "Twinned with….". It was also emphasized that municipalities cannot be left to face their problems without the appropriate means. Moreover, knowledge, and not money, was the most vital commodity cities could exchange.

3. The event was attended by more than two hundred participants representing major cities and international, regional and national city networks and associations and consisted of three sessions:

First session

4. Participants shared experiences in city-to-city cooperation, discussing ways and means of successful cooperation and the pitfalls to be avoided. A guide on city-to-city cooperation was tabled. Mayors and municipal officials were presented with partnership models including those between Lomé (Togo) and Lyon (France) and between Quebec City (Canada) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). They included components such as technology transfer, training of municipal workers, inspection of sanitation systems and cultural exchanges. Mayors described these components as "shared contributions to citizenship" as each city is facing similar problems. They stressed the importance of strengthening local Government in LDCs and the need for transparency, especially in budgetary matters. The participants agreed that the key to successful city-to-city cooperative agreements begins with the establishment of personal relations and is not based solely on financial aid.

5. The idea of city-to-city cooperation, whether North-South or South-South, is not new. Since the 1960s, several attempts have been made. Initially, they were based on cultural exchange and gradually progressed toward global technical cooperation. Several networks for city-to-city cooperation are emerging to promote knowledge on local politics and to build and strengthen the municipality capacities.

6. During the discussions, it was emphasized that such cooperation could provide excellent opportunities for the exchange of information in a variety of areas, including skills and management techniques. Through city-to-city cooperation, the establishment of mutually beneficial programmes could be implemented. Women's participation in such programmes is deemed essential.

7. Success of programmes would be largely dependent on the strength of the partnership and the coordination between players that could contribute to enhancing people's civic responsibilities.   The reciprocal nature of cooperation relationships was underscored, particularly between cities. It is important that these cities have: a clear understanding of the parameters, which cooperation and resulting programmes are based on; careful preparation; and realistic expectations.

Second session

8. This dealt with Governments and international institutions for city-to-city cooperation, local governance, training, action by networks of cities and financing.

9. The central role of cities in global development efforts was emphasized, as they have an essential role to play in the fight against poverty. While globalization has placed many cities in a highly competitive framework, those in LDCs often lack the experience and capacity to compete in accessing financial assistance and capacity-building through city-to-city cooperation.   If decentralization is to work in LDC cities, local capacities must be strengthened. A country's development can be measured by the degree to which its cities are evolving.

10. Without the necessary resources, the many cooperation initiatives proposed at the event will not succeed. In March 2000, the cities of Geneva, Lyon and Bamako launched an international solidarity fund for cities, whereby financial support would go hand-in-hand with the transfer of technical skills. Sister Cities in the United States will, in the near future, launch an innovative programme for financing based on local sources from the private sector, local institutions and individual contributions rather than from Governmental or international funding. Major institutions may help finance pilot projects, although national and international development partners may be unable to review thousands of potential small-scale investment projects or provide funding. Local communities must conduct their own fund-raising. The experience of the United States proves this can be done. The private sector and local citizens are more than willing to help. Sister Cities pointed out that a total of 95 per cent of all projects conducted by United States communities are financed by the private sector.

Third session

11. This session considered the creation of a "cooperation fair" for cities seeking new partnerships and aimed at providing opportunities to facilitate *in situ* contacts between cities wishing to commit to city-to-city cooperation (South-South and North-South). An announcement made concerning the agreement and commitment of participating cities to continue their talks to establish future city-to-city cooperative arrangements.

12. Cities announcing possible cooperation agreements were: Port-au-Prince (Haiti) with cities in Madagascar; Lokossa (Benin) with Andenne and Evere in Belgium. Possible agreements were announced by the city of Banjul (The Gambia) and Ostend (Belgium). The Mayor of Brussels stated that contact has been established with the Mayors of Kigali (Rwanda), Kinshasa (RDC), Dakar (Senegal), among others.

13. The Rapporteur for the event, presented a report on the session's proceedings and noted that, despite ongoing difficulties related to financing and autonomy, the current world environment favoured the emergence of city-to-city cooperation. A number of new innovative cooperation agreements with different objectives and methods of implementation are emerging. These take into account how cities function and how social relations within them evolve. It was emphasized that cities could play a fundamental role in the worldwide fight against poverty and in this context cooperation can take many forms and be established on wide-ranging foundations and diverse implementation mechanisms. It is clear that city-to-city cooperation can take many forms and be established for a wide range of reasons. As Mayors are ideally placed to fight poverty and improve people's livelihoods, good governance is critical. To facilitate development efforts, cities must have an adequate resource base, access to information technology and substantial autonomy. International institutions could best assist cities by supporting decisions rather than imposing them.

14. The event concluded with the adoption by Mayors of a declaration. The declaration took special note of the particular structural difficulties facing cities in LDCs as well as poor living conditions. It stressed that combating urban poverty is a shared commitment and that any

future action plans would address the needs of the poorest members of their societies, with emphasis on women, children and the aged.

15. The Mayors formally committed themselves to the fight against poverty in their cities and expressed their determination to actively promote city-to-city cooperation and acknowledge that the fight against poverty is a shared responsibility among local authorities, Governments and the international community. They also agreed on the importance of involving all affected citizens in setting up measures to address their situation and called on Governments and the international community to consider debt cancellation and increased aid.

16. The deliverables coming out of the Mayors' event are summarized below:

- Contribution from the international, regional and national city networks toward the development and establishment of city-to-city cooperation (IULA, FMCU, CITYNET, Sister City, AIMF, FMC, Alliance of African Mayors against Aids, Union of Belgian cities and communities, WACAP, COMVAL);
- The determination of cities to cooperate;
- Formalization of agreements between Belgian cities and cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America;
- Establishment of a fund to support city-to-city cooperation ("Fonds International de Solidarité des Villes" initiated by the cities of Lyon, Geneva and Bamako);
- Establishment of an innovative method of financing for city-to-city cooperation (Sister Cities, United States);
- UNDP opened a window of opportunity for city-to-city cooperation through the Trust Fund on Democratic Governance was launched during LDC III;
- Establishment of a methodology/guide on city-to-city cooperation;
- Announcement by the European Commission to provide financial support to WACAP for training municipal civil servants;
- Support provided by UNDP/UNV to implement cooperation agreements;
- Participation of the private sector in initiatives with cities on social projects;
- The importance of Government support to make city-to-city cooperation successful. During the meeting, two Governments announced contributions to LDC cities: (a) Monaco to Dakar and Cotonou for new information technologies and micro-credit; and (b) the Belgian Government-financed pilot project.