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

Parallel event

MEETING OF MAYORS:

BRUSSELS DECLARATION OF MAYORS

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1. We, the Mayors, leaders and representatives of cities in the least developed countries and of local governments from every continent, meeting in Brussels on 15 and 16 May 2001 on the occasion of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, have adopted the following declaration in the spirit of the topic of our meeting, "City-to-city cooperation" to eradicate urban poverty.

2. We thank the United Nations organizations (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)) and the European Union for their contribution, the World Alliance of Cities against Poverty and the host city, Brussels, for implementing this initiative and organizing the work, and the World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination and its members for their considerable input into the overall discussion.

3. Considering that cities in the least developed countries are confronted with a double phenomenon:

- Urbanization intensified by the rural exodus due to impoverishment, desertification and wars in the countryside, leading to overpopulation in relation to the infrastructure's capacity to absorb newcomers;
- A crucial lack of resources to satisfy the basic social needs of these extremely impoverished populations.

4. Noting that these phenomena are not temporary and are tending to become structural, with dramatic consequences for the majority of the poor population living mostly in makeshift housing on the outskirts of cities, devoting all their energy to looking for food and with no access to health care, primary education, land for construction, drinking-water supplies and environmental quality.

5. Convinced that neglect of these vital needs is largely responsible for the upsurge in social ills in cities in the form of drugs, AIDS, prostitution and insecurity.

6. Persuaded that local authorities, Governments and the international community share the responsibility for combating urban poverty.

Commitment by local authorities

7. We undertake to make the fight against poverty in our cities the priority in our programme of action, by mobilizing all the human and material resources available to make basic social services for all accessible to the urban population. For this purpose, our city

councils will develop strategies and plans of action in the areas of health, nutrition, primary education and basic training, drinking-water supplies, action to reduce makeshift housing and protection of the urban environment, by targeting the most vulnerable groups of the population, women, children and older persons.

8. We are determined to promote and develop city-to-city cooperation and to encourage exchanges of experience and mutual assistance in order to reach the goal of access to basic social services for all.

9. We will take care to ensure that citizens, including those in greatest need, are involved in drawing up and implementing measures to improve their living conditions.

10. In the light of this, we recognize the urgent need for city councils to adapt and modernize in each country in order to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century by working in partnership with the Government and with the various components of civil society, including associations and the private sector.

Appeal to Governments

11. We call on our Governments to do everything in their power in terms of legislation and resource allocation to:

- Ensure the effective local decentralization of responsibilities and resources, through the appropriate fiscal reform, to face the growing social needs of urban populations;
- Establish a solidarity mechanism linking the rich cities and the poor cities in each country;
- Formalize the relations with city councils by fixing the obligations of the parties in defining the goals, the corresponding resources and the deadlines for the implementation of priority social projects;
- Protect poor population groups in disadvantaged urban areas from the negative social effects of structural adjustment programmes;
- Ensure that the trade liberalization advocated by the new multilateral framework for international trade does not lead to a deterioration in the living and working conditions of urban populations.

Appeal for international solidarity

12. We call on the international community, particularly the most industrialized countries, which are the world's main donor countries, to:

- Cancel the debt of the most heavily indebted countries, as servicing this debt is jeopardizing all social progress in our cities;
- Increase development assistance, at the bilateral and multilateral level, by supporting the urban projects of the United Nations Development Programme in our respective countries;
- Promote sustainable urban development and city-to-city cooperation.

Brussels, 16 May 2001
