

7 October 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Habitat Day**

Seven October is a day to reflect on the state of human settlements and the basic right to adequate shelter. This year's theme "City to City Cooperation" of the World Habitat Day highlights the importance of different links and networks between cities in this globalizing world. The observance of this day allows us to focus on the overall increasing role of cities, which are becoming the main engines of economic growth and social development in the developing world as well. It is expected that during the next 30 years the populations in cities will double, particularly in Asia. It is therefore necessary to be prepared for the challenges of the future and to fulfill the overall objective of sustainable development.

Two years ago the international community agreed on targets relating to shelter and humane settlements as stated in the Millennium Declaration. Indeed "City to City Cooperation" can be perceived as one of the strategies, which can lead to the improvement of lives of 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. Partnerships between cities, as a means of fostering sustainable urbanization, through exchange of knowledge and best practices, are increasingly recognized as a promising and cost effective way to urban planning and development. Therewithal, the decentralized approach, which enables direct participation of the local inhabitants, is a very good example of development cooperation.

"City to City Cooperation" also implies that we are acknowledging that local authorities have an important task in to-day's world, as agents for promoting relations between regions and countries.

There is a long history of "bilateral" ties between cities. During the last decade and especially after the City Summit in Istanbul six years ago, the approach has become more "multilateral", more complex and with a global perspective. We can look back at examples of good cooperation and exchange of best practices in the past amongst cities which included town planning, infrastructure for communications, waterworks, security for the citizens, traffic solutions, financing for appropriate housing and so on. All these examples, which are in perfect harmony with the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, are the proof that the transfer of knowledge between different cooperating cities all around the globe will lead to strengthening of good governance and also help poorer communities to better organize themselves to advance their interests.

The theme of this year's World Habitat Day is formulated to advance the expansion of new partnerships between cities for the benefit of all the inhabitants of cities throughout the world.

On this occasion let me emphasize that UN Habitat plays an important role in improving the living environment in cities and in disseminating knowledge regarding management of cities. I think that the international community also shares this recognition, as was clearly illustrated last year, when the mandate of United Nations Habitat was strengthened through promoting its status to that of a United Nations Programme.