



*Towards an
improved use
of underground
Space*

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Topic

UNDERGROUND AND ENVIRONMENT

Title

The Challenge of Sustaining Our Habitat

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Remarks: ITA culminated its work with the Habitat office of the United Nations by sending two delegates to the recent United Nations mega-conference, Habitat II, which was held in Istanbul last June. Dr. Harvey Parker, ITA's representative to the United Nations and Jean-Paul Godard of ITA's Executive Council were invited by the UN Department of Development Services and Management Systems (DDSMS) to be Official Representatives to a high-level full-day panel discussion, called the Water Dialogue. This dialogue session addressed water issues facing Habitat in the future.

Dr. Parker continued to intervene for ITA in other Dialogue sessions on Transportation and on Energy. ITA has been working with the United Nations in preparation for Habitat II since September 1993 when ITA Executive Council met in New York with numerous officials of the UN, including Dr. Aliye Celik, Officer-in-Charge of Habitat in New York. Subsequently, through the efforts of Dr. Harvey Parker, Jean-Paul Godard and Annica Nordmark, ITA prepared working papers for the Habitat newsletter, "Countdown to Istanbul". In addition, Dr. Celik was the Keynote Speaker for NAT '96, which was the venue for ITA's 1996 annual meeting which was held last April in Washington D.C.

HABITAT II

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The 21st century will be the "Century of the City". The great paradox is that so few of us are aware of it. Although cities have been exploding around us for half a century or more, for the most part, the new urban world has taken all of us by surprise. Just 50 years ago - as the United Nations was coming into being - almost 90% of the world population lived in rural areas. In the next forty years, global population will grow by 3.7 billion people. Ninety percent of this growth will be in developing countries and 90% of that will be in urban areas. Unless the urban agenda is addressed, the repercussions threaten to dominate and engulf the dawning century with a vast array of problems: increasing urban poverty, homelessness and substandard housing, unemployment and disaffection among youth, ethnic tension, violence, overly stressed urban infrastructure, social disintegration, land degradation, traffic congestion, air, water and noise pollution, and epidemics ranging from tuberculosis to AIDS. Urbanization does not necessarily represent a destabilizing threat. Nevertheless, the trend towards urbanization, when combined with other factors - such as an inadequate physical infrastructure to absorb new city residents,

an insufficient economic base to keep pace with the rapidly rising population, and the lack of resources which can be devoted to developing the necessary social infrastructure to accommodate the stresses of urbanization - creates a potentially destabilizing situation. Statistics demonstrate that only one third of urban dwellers in developing nations have water piped to their homes and less than 35% have access to sewage facilities. Many national and municipal governments in developing countries face serious financial problems in providing low-cost housing, drinking water, adequate facilities for sewage and garbage disposal, health, transportation and educational services. In the future, governments in developing countries will find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to extend infrastructure and services to the poor through conventional public service delivery arrangements. This is the challenge for those of us dealing with infrastructure. Infrastructure needs of the poor will have to be met. Among the most important services that national, municipal and local governments can provide in urban settlements is the construction of large scale capital infrastructure for transportation, sanitation, public safety, recreation and health facilities. Tunnelling will be a useful tool in the provision of energy, clean water, sewage and transportation systems. Thus, there will be a great challenge for underground systems for infrastructure and tunnelling to provide affordable and easily applicable technical solutions needed by cities, especially the poorer groups in the cities. Substandard housing, unsafe water and poor sanitation in densely populated cities are responsible for 10 million deaths worldwide every year. All these deaths can be prevented by sustainable human settlements development. The reconceptualization of the global agenda that is called for by the impact of a global urban civilization, however, is not a task that can be completed by (the) Habitat (conference) alone. It is in the interest of every nation to see to it that these human habitats - from the smallest to the largest - are made safe and liveable so that we pass on to our children an urban world that can sustain them in harmony, and urban world rid of the shameful poverty, the inequality, the discrimination that still pervades its ghettos, an urban world at peace with the environment and with itself. This is our collective challenge.

Dr Aliye Celik, Officer in Charge, New York Office, United Nations centre for Human Settlement.

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