



**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



# **REPORT OF THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE WORLD URBAN FORUM**

THE WORLD'S PREMIER CONFERENCE ON CITIES

## **THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: BRIDGING THE URBAN DIVIDE**

Front cover:

**Official logo for the Fifth Session of the World Urban Forum as outdoor advertisement.**

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Back cover:

**Top: Slum Dwellers International at the opening ceremony**

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**Bottom: Entertainment by G.R.E.S. Portela at the closing ceremony.**

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RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL**

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**22–26 MARCH, 2010**



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# Overview

1. The fifth session of the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro attracted 13,795 people from 150 countries around the world, providing clear evidence of the growing demand for more global dialogue, exchange and mutual learning on sustainable urbanization. Such exchanges are required to meet the challenges and realize the opportunities entailed in the accelerating global trend towards an urbanized future, which has implications for every country. That was one of the key messages conveyed by United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) partners both inside and outside government, during a week of intense debate.
2. Furthermore, the presence at the fifth session of the World Urban Forum of a greater number of heads of State, government ministers, mayors and leaders of global foundations and big business reaffirmed both the Forum and its glittering exhibition as the world's premier cities convention.
3. Responding to the occasion in a spirit of generosity and creativity the Brazilian Government, while hosting the Forum, took the opportunity to build a modern waterfront convention centre, bringing new prestige investment, social space and visitors to a once depressed Rio dockside neighbourhood in need of upgrading.
4. Many thousands of visitors streamed in to see more than 110 lively and vibrant displays from 35 countries – a huge increase on the numbers attending previous sessions of the World Urban Forum. The exhibitors were as varied as the numerous interest groups present at the Forum, including youth and a large number of women. On display were learning institutions showcasing study packages, Governments highlighting their best practices, big businesses exhibiting the latest in exciting new technology, and non-governmental organizations – including grassroots women's organizations – demonstrating how innovative and creative people can be, even the very poor and signalling a new dawn for a greener urban future and energy saving technology.
5. The open and often frank debate on the main theme of the Forum, "The right to the city: bridging the urban divide", produced a fresh range of interesting ideas for policy and practice that enhance the ideals outlined in the Habitat Agenda. High on the agenda were the issues of climate change, and its potentially disastrous impact on cities, and the reduction of the huge urban pollution footprint.
6. A highlight of the Forum was the launch of the World Urban Campaign to elevate the drive by UN-Habitat and its Habitat Agenda Partners for better, smarter, greener and more equitable cities to a new level. Launched by Ms. Anna Tibaijuka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, it also underscored one of the main objectives of UN-Habitat – that of forging effective partnerships between and with the public, private and civil society sectors.
7. The power of the Forum was manifest in its large numbers and high level of representation, including two heads of State, vice-presidents, a prime minister, senior ministers and other political leaders, bringing a new level of sophistication to the event. The Brazilian President, senior ministers and other political leaders of the country were at hand.
8. Several member States of the Governing Council which oversees UN-Habitat made it clear that they were paying very close attention to the ideas generated by the Forum and would seek mechanisms to strengthen links between those ideas and the work of UN-Habitat. Indeed, by assuming a more informal nature, the Forum was able to serve as a vehicle for international conversations and cooperation at every level, and also across social and economic divides. For example, at networking events and in other contexts, government ministers from many different countries met to discuss the problems of a rapidly urbanizing world. They used these meetings to forge new approaches to North-South, and South-South cooperation. It also provided a chance for fresh interactions between mayors and Governments. Furthermore, it was a vehicle through which grassroots women's groups, youth or slum dwellers were able to interact with Government representatives, global parliamentarians and municipal leaders. A significant number of participants were attending the Forum for the first time and almost all were inspired by initiatives and programmes for improving conditions in the favelas – the Brazilian slums.
9. Added to the dynamic mix were the foundations – both large and small – that could not afford to lose the opportunities offered by the Forum. Big business groups were also present and some of them are now working with UN-Habitat around the world, promoting the World Urban Campaign, bringing know-how in disaster relief programmes, and also in water and sanitation improvements, initiating

educational interventions and new ways of bridging the digital divide, and also financing slum upgrading.

10. Another important highlight was a special meeting which focused on improving the rebuilding initiative in Haiti following an earthquake of such magnitude that it is considered the world's greatest urban disaster. The country's Prime Minister was at hand, and a special message was read out from former United States President, Mr. Bill Clinton, in his role as Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General. UN-Habitat is the lead coordinator for housing, land and planning. Furthermore this session, a precursor to a major pledging conference, was a seminal event for South-South cooperation at the Forum.
11. To an extent unparalleled by all preceding biennial forums, the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro was a political event of note that helped Governments, parliamentarians and local authorities push for legislation on sustainable, equitable cities at home. The Forum, including the consultations, exchanges, and show-casing events that took place, attained a new level in Rio. It transcended the traditional characteristics of exchanging ideas and experiences, becoming a vehicle for the making of commitments, not simply in subscribing to shared norms and ideals, but in the pursuit of specific goals and actions.
12. Stakeholders at different levels of governance, across constituencies, and from every region underscored the need for the Forum to have a stronger focus on making our cities more sustainable. Action and follow-ups, monitoring and evaluation became the rallying call in much of the discussion. There is a need to capitalize on this momentum and to create a mechanism for actual follow-up on these commitments on the part of UN-Habitat, Governments and Habitat Agenda Partners. In many countries, the concept of the "right to the city" is relatively new and the Forum fostered rich discussions around this topic. One way of understanding the concept is not to define the city geographically or administratively, but rather as a space for citizenship with rights to use and ownership. Such understanding at government, city and community levels can lead to strong and effective ways of bridging the urban divide. Through the use of different terminologies and references, there was a valuable exploration of the essence of the right to the city across regions, constituencies, and levels of governance.
13. In a world where millions of people are increasingly vulnerable to the deprivations associated with overburdened infrastructure, inadequate housing and outmoded health care systems, or deprived of urban service delivery, Governments need to be aware that, within the next 30 years, one in three people could be living in near total deprivation. These challenges are further compounded by the increasing number of refugees and internally displaced people, who often end up in cities. It is projected that by then 70 per cent of the world's population will be living in cities.
14. This is why some of the most distinctive issues emerging from the Forum were those on the evolution of new forms of partnerships. The traditional nomenclature of public, private, and civil society has deepened further and with it have come new modalities, tools, and norms that were shared and fostered in the course of the week.
15. The Forum offered three key messages and opportunities for new partnerships: to build communities more sustainably; to restore security to housing markets; and to incorporate innovative and sustainable approaches in the way that we plan for disaster and offset climate change. It was acknowledged that the notions of sustainability and inclusiveness entailed recognition and positive harnessing of the role, energy and vibrancy of women, youth and children, the key urban stakeholders. They are after all in the majority and deserve a stronger voice in society. Urban governance and participatory practices need to pay special heed to the role and place of these actors. The spotlight was placed on a number of important living practices and attention drawn to the need to scale up these practices. The role of knowledge, education, information and capacity-building was found to be paramount in bridging the urban divide. Universities and professional associations need to connect more with local institutions and communities. New tools, insights and techniques are required in order to bridge this divide and the two institutions are best positioned to provide these levers and play a rightful role.
16. The Forum underscored the urgent need to embrace a greener more sustainable future for the world's metropolitan areas. Only such an approach can raise the standard of living for billions of people and allow them to gain access to health, education and basic services. It is also necessary for the promotion of democratic governance at the local level where it matters, and to give concrete expression to a rights-based approach to development. Lastly, it will help all of us become more responsible and discerning producers and consumers and overcome the challenges of climate change.
17. The key messages emerging from the Forum requiring follow-up and action may be summed up as follows:



## A. Message 1

18. The time has come to move beyond mere advocacy and commitment to the legal notion of the “right to the city”. Greater effort needs to be directed towards putting in place appropriate legal and institutional frameworks as well as the necessary investments to make the right to the city a reality. Practical efforts to give effect to this right must take due account of the social and cultural diversity that prevails in each context and must use that diversity to build the strength and vitality of urban communities.

## B. Message 2

19. There is a need to conduct a thorough review and analysis of governance institutions. The prominence of cities in national landscapes, the changing social composition of cities, as well as the current challenges confronting cities all call for institutional renewal, including changes in behaviour and political relations.
20. We can no longer continue to do business as usual. In the past this has resulted in unacceptable levels of social exclusion and deprivation. Heart-rending testimonials of homelessness, of forced evictions, and of deprivation of the right to the city serve as a stark reminder of the human and social cost of disenfranchisement.
21. Repeated calls were made for new and bold approaches to planning, new paradigms for service delivery and new business models for urban development. Repeated calls were also made for these bold new approaches to be accompanied by equally bold policy frameworks and leadership at the national and local levels.

## C. Message 3

22. Urban inequality is not limited to income but includes a number of other important dimensions. Bridging the urban divide thus requires an integrated approach that articulates economic, social, political and cultural forms of inclusiveness

down those numbers. Making our cities more resilient and climate-proof requires better and more rational land-use planning, greener and more robust building codes, and smart infrastructure and services. This can best be achieved by harnessing the full potential of technology in order to reduce the ecological footprint of our cities while making our public infrastructure and services more accessible and more affordable.

24. Numerous sessions, including the launch of a global standard for measuring and reducing green-house-gases in cities and the presentation of the winners of a new building re-skinning award, provided evidence of how these new technologies are making a difference. They require, nonetheless, governance structures capable of motivating and mobilizing people, communities, companies and public authorities to make investments today that will not only save money tomorrow but will also demystify the technological divide.
25. In the megacities of Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America, everyone gained when markets opened for green technology to reverse the effects of global warming, so that billions of families can live in communities of choice, opportunity and hope. Failure in this area will affect both the economy and global security alike. In other words, if well guided, the urbanization process can be an engine for economic and social development. If, however, it is poorly managed or simply not managed at all, urbanization will lead to social exclusion, poverty and a greater urban divide.

## E. Message 5

26. Everyone involved in urban poverty reduction must bear in mind that, in effecting these changes, it is important to work *with* the poor, not for them. It is always important to keep in mind that those living in poverty have the right to uplift themselves, and the right to legal assistance in doing so, and the right to a say in decisions that affect their lives. To paraphrase the refrain of a Brazilian samba, by Antonio Carlos Jobim: “When the voice of the slum is heard, the whole city will sing!”

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