

Delegation from
The United States of America

Represented by
West Virginia University

Position Paper for Habitat III

The issues before Habitat III are: Building Resilient Cities to Promote Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, Realizing the Right to Adequate Shelter through the New Urban Agenda, Inclusive Urbanization for the Promotion of Equality and Social Cohesion. The United States of America encourages further commitments to climate-friendly and disaster resistant infrastructure through research and information sharing among various relevant experts. The United States calls for more best-practice sharing related to the creation of urban adequate housing. The United States stresses the need to adopt policies reflecting the correlation between gender and racial equality and inclusive urbanization.

I. Building Resilient Cities to Promote Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

According to United Nations estimates, two-thirds of the human population is expected to live in cities by 2050. Given this projection, the United States of America understands the urgent need to promote city resiliency, as high concentrations of people are highly vulnerable to climate change and disaster risk. Commending the success of the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 in the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the United States emphasizes SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG 13, Climate Action. The physical, economic, and social challenges associated with growing global urbanization can be addressed through the establishment of sustainable practices and climate change adaptation and disaster risk mitigation strategies. A 2014 GROSVENOR report scored international cities for their overall resilience by factors of vulnerability and adaptive capacity; five of the leading ten were located in the United States. The Rockefeller Foundation, established in 1913 in the United States, has pioneered the 100 Resilient Cities Network to build resilience to the social, economic, and physical challenges urban areas face in the 21st century. This program prepares international metropolitan communities to withstand, respond, and adapt to the chronic stresses and acute shocks experienced within a city. Recalling the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21), the United States commends the adoption of the first universal climate agreement. At the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) forum of COP21 Michael Bloomberg, C40 Board President and Mayor of New York City, said, "It's critical that industries and investors understand the risks posed by climate change, but currently there is too little transparency about those risks." In accordance with this statement and the Rio+20 Summit on environmental sustainability commitments, the United States believes a system of financial checks and balances in international industry and trade must exist to ensure transparency in their role in climate change. Noting A/RES/69/218, the US emphasizes the need for international cooperation in the adoption of enhanced measures to better adapt to and mitigate the recurring weather disturbances associated with the El Niño phenomenon through technological developments and information sharing among Member States. The US recognizes the roles that environmental protection and climate risk alleviation play in preserving World Heritage properties and historical cultural practices. Fully believing in the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the United States encourages partnerships at the local level that involve new actors to stimulate engagement and strengthen national frameworks regarding disaster risk reduction in order to safeguard cultural heritage from prospective risks and share knowledge of disaster risk and adaptation policies. Through the distribution of resources at the national level, such as UNESCO's Managing Disaster Risks for World Heritage Resource Manual, additional support can be provided to allow States to take ownership of implementing their own national strategies. The US commends the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, A/RES/69/283, in the UN Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), and the United States Global Development Policy and urges the body to reach further consensus on a long-term and inclusive solution that considers factors of accountability, efficiency, and innovation. The United States *calls upon* all Member States to follow through with previous commitments to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through climate-friendly infrastructure and *encourages* the further reinforcement of strategies established at the WCDRR. The United States *stresses* the need for advancement in alternative energy research and an increase in global education of the financial and worldwide benefits of sustainable development. The United States *requests* Member States make strides to strengthen the regional cooperation and networks developed at COP21 and Rio+20 among the leading scientific and political experts through information sharing and joint plans.

II. Realizing the Right to Adequate Shelter through the New Urban Agenda

The right to adequate housing is protected under the right to an adequate standard of living by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) adopted in 1948. Additionally, this right has been reaffirmed through A/RES/42/146 and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Goal 11 of the SDGs also discusses the importance of safe, resilient, and sustainable cities that are both socially and environmentally

responsible. The United States continues to take the issue of increasing access to adequate shelter very seriously. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that US population will increase by 80 million by 2050, 60 million of who will live in urban areas. Currently, the US Census Bureau reports that 25.7% of US households in 2010 were living in census-defined “poverty areas”, up from 18.1% in 2000. This increase is due in large part to the financial crisis and crash of housing markets in 2008. In terms of adequate housing, the same Census report showed that approximately 94% of US households had access to adequate housing in 2010, a figure that has remained essentially constant over the past decade. A 2013 study by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported that in 2009, less than two percent of occupied housing units were considered “severely inadequate”. Still, the United States government and HUD have continued to make adequate housing a strong priority with programs like the 1999 Healthy Homes Initiative, a HUD program that aims to protect children and families from housing-related health and safety hazards, and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) that aims to promote affordable rental housing production. These actions are consistent with the goals laid out in A/RES/52/191 which urged governments to formulate strategies to provide more adequate shelter and housing services. The US also encourages private-sector initiatives to address these growing problems. One positive model for private-sector collaboration has been the International Housing Partnership (IHP). Founded in 2003, IHP consists of more than 175 high-capacity housing non-profits from the US, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia that collectively operate more than a million affordable homes that house approximately 2.5 million people. In December 2014, the United States continued to demonstrate how seriously it takes the work of UN Habitat III and its mission by holding the inaugural meeting of the UN Habitat III National Committee, chaired by HUD Secretary Julian Castro. The National Committee includes diverse members from over 40 organizations from the private, federal, regional, and state levels as well as academia, philanthropy, and civil society. Furthermore, Omaha, Nebraska hosted a UN Habitat initiative called the Urban Thinkers Campus in November 2015 with the hopes of inspiring more small- and mid-sized cities around the world to develop measures to contribute to the New Urban Agenda. The United States *reaffirms* the importance of SDG Goal 11 and the need for adequate housing. The United States *strongly encourages* Member States to continue to develop programs and mechanisms, both domestic and multilateral, that work to provide increased access to adequate housing in ways that offer maximum social benefits and environmental sustainability. The United States *proposes* that Member States work together to promote best-practice sharing among a wider variety of public and private organizations as it relates to urban housing development.

III. Inclusive Urbanization for the Promotion of Equality and Social Cohesion

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit, UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon stated that, “Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development and much more. At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically.” The migration from rural to urban areas can reasonably be accredited to the common pursuit of opportunity, both social and educational, and economic prosperity. Consequently, the increased concentration of extreme poverty is directly proportionate to the increase in population. Reaffirming SDG 11, the United States stresses the need for programs that increase access to safe and affordable housing and improve urban planning in an inclusive and accessible manner. Noting A/RES/24/3, the US encourages all Member States to take responsibility for developing inclusive policies and reforms that encourage social cohesion and reflect the needs of all communities. Through enhanced distribution and access to social services, the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, and minorities can be developed and protected. The 2007 Global Monitoring Report by the World Bank found that economic growth positively correlates with gender equality and that poverty tends to be lower in areas with greater gender equality. The US applauds the efforts of international instruments like the World Urban Forum (WUF) which promote strong multilateral cooperation to address these issues relating to equitable growth and shared urban prosperity. WUF and similar initiatives act as platforms that work to ensure that all parts of the population benefit from the economic and social potential of cities. In addition, the environmental justice movement stresses that regardless of race, gender, national origin, or income, all people should have the same degree of protection from environmental hazards. The US Environmental Protection Agency issued Plan EJ 2014 which will help the agency integrate environmental justice into its future policies and programs. In this way, the US has been consistent with A/RES/69/327 which calls for a renewed commitment to equality and inclusion in public policy. The United States *urges* Member States to follow suit and adopt appropriate environmental justice policies with regard to equitable urbanization in order to promote urban environmental equality. The United States *stresses* the need for urbanization initiatives that work for everyone, regardless of their income. The United States *emphasizes* the fact that gender equality can help reduce poverty and *calls upon* Member States to integrate gender equality protections into their domestic strategies for promoting inclusive urbanization.