



General Assembly

PROVISIONAL

A/42/PV.34

13 October 1987

ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 12 October 1987, at 10 a.m.

President:

Mr. FLORIN

(German Democratic Republic)

- Report of the Economic and Social Council: Observance of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless [12]

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the Official Records of the General Assembly.

Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, within one week, to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Department of Conference Services, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): It is a great honour for me today to open this special plenary meeting on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, which we are observing in accordance with resolution 41/190 of the United Nations General Assembly.

Food and housing are two basic elements essential to life. Yet, in many developing countries these vitally important elements are not provided in sufficient quantities, with the result that the needs of the majority of people, especially the poor, are still not being satisfied. Although mankind has the resources and knowledge to produce sufficient food and housing for everybody, vast numbers of the world's inhabitants remain hungry and without housing.

Despite the efforts of Governments and the international community, the indications are that the housing conditions of many people throughout the world are deteriorating, even as demand expands in the wake of population growth.

(The President)

The designation of 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless was a recognition of the magnitude and severity of the world housing problem and a signal of the intention of the United Nations to tackle this problem at the international level.

As has been confirmed on many occasions by the General Assembly, and most recently in its resolution 41/146, "Realization of the right to adequate housing", the right to adequate housing is a basic human right. Unfortunately, however, an enormous number of people are not in a position to enjoy that right. The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has made it possible to increase awareness of this problem, demonstrate the well-known reasons for the absence of sufficient housing construction and propose ways and means of overcoming the constraints which prevent us from providing adequate housing.

The housing problem is primarily a social problem. It has to be looked at in close interrelationship with events within the individual countries. Every State must step up its efforts to mobilize all its material and human resources in all areas. Investment in housing construction and infrastructure will also serve the broader objectives of strengthening national economies and creating employment, and, by creating a demand for local materials and capital goods, will help to ensure a solid technological basis for industrial development. Moreover, adequate housing is one of the decisive factors in maintaining appropriate levels of health care and labour productivity in the society. Thus, measures and action taken to build houses and the infrastructure can be seen as one of the elements in the overall activities in this area of human settlements, and this is an integral part of the national efforts with regard to economic and social development.

All of this is to be found in the report of the Secretary-General (A/42/378), which I now commend to the General Assembly for serious and thorough

(The President)

consideration. I would also draw attention to what is being done in several countries, including the German Democratic Republic, by way of housing construction programmes, the aim being to eliminate the housing problem as a social problem over the next few years.

The United Nations has the extremely important task of ensuring favourable international conditions for the solution of the housing problem. In addition to taking practical steps to resolve global economic problems, it is necessary, above all, to ensure international peace and security, since the prevention of a thermo-nuclear world war is the essential prerequisite for the prosperity of civilization and its settlements.

With about 1 billion people who either do not have adequate housing or have no housing at all, the task of ensuring adequate housing for all, the cost of ensuring adequate shelter for all is bound to be enormous. Yet, everyone knows that, however enormous that expenditure may be, it is minuscule compared to global expenditure on armaments. The fact that every year an enormous amount of the world's resources is wasted on armaments is documented in many studies and recently attention has again been drawn to this in the documents and deliberations at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which was held in this Hall last month.

In 1985 world expenditure on armaments amounted to \$US 8 trillion, which is about \$US 1.5 million every minute. One can only imagine what would happen regarding this housing problem - and indeed many other economic and social development problems facing mankind today - if even a small fraction of that money could be diverted from the production of weapons to efforts to attain the goals of peace and development.

(The President)

I believe that the increased attention being paid to the question of redistributing resources is eloquent proof that most people understand the extremely close interrelationship of peace, disarmament and development.

In conclusion I would just say that the Commission on Human Settlements has proposed a global strategy to the year 2000 as a follow-up to the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. That is a practical proposal which deserves the most thorough study by all Governments. It could start the world on a course of action that would bring about a significant improvement in the housing situation by the year 2000 and enable us to attain our cherished objective of decent adequate housing for all.

I now call upon the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The General Assembly has before it my report, which sums up the results of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and sets out the main elements of a new agenda for human settlements to guide action up to the year 2000 and beyond. It was the recognition of the vast and growing nature of the global housing problem and of the need for new strategies to deal with it that prompted the Assembly's designation of 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. However, since housing is inextricably related to other elements of human settlements development, the Economic and Social Council suggested that my report be placed in the general context of trends and prospects in this sphere. These are in turn influenced by population and economic trends. My report is therefore somewhat like a global overview.

The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless was envisaged to have a slightly different character from other international years. Action was to focus on innovative national approaches which could potentially be adopted in other countries also, so that knowledge of shelter options could be disseminated to all Member States for their consideration.

(The Secretary-General)

The goal was to highlight programmes which met the basic housing needs of the poor and the disadvantaged in order to make it easier for Governments to bring about immediate, though small, improvements and at the same time set themselves on a course which would result in substantial improvements for all by the year 2000.

It was a fundamental principle of the whole strategy that housing solutions should be linked to national resources and that international assistance should be seen only as a necessary support, not as a substitute for comprehensive national action. My report points out that a sound and workable housing policy must rely on effective utilization, development and mobilization of indigenous resources and skills and on the full involvement of community groups in planning, building, maintaining and improving shelter and infrastructure. It also points out that, to provide shelter on a scale commensurate with need, Governments must, consistent with their social systems, make provision for participation in the production process by formal and informal entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, co-operatives and individual households.

In its simplest terms, the recommended line of action envisages a partnership between the public and the non-public sectors, both formal and informal, enlisting governmental action as well as the self-help effort of the people themselves. This concept can be extended to the entire settlement structure. The long-term goal should be to achieve a decentralized operation of the settlements system, making maximum use of local initiatives and resources. A development approach which emphasizes national self-reliance clearly has a lot to commend it from the immediate financial as well as the long-term social viewpoint.

The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has been a success in generating awareness of the problem of homelessness and inadequate shelter and it has gone some way to strengthen the corresponding commitment to take action towards

(The Secretary-General)

the solution of the problem. For this, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Renasinghe Premadasa, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, for his vision in proposing the International Year. I thank the Commission on Human Settlements and its secretariat, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for the sound programme that was drawn up for the Year and efficiently implemented. I should like to convey my appreciation to all Member States which have participated in the observance of the Year, undertaken substantive activities within their own countries and given support to the international effort.

I also salute the effort of the hundreds of thousands of men and women, civic and community groups, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and multilateral and bilateral aid agencies that have worked hard at all levels over the past four years to advance the objectives of the Year. These objectives can be achieved only through a concerted action set within the framework of specific national shelter strategies. This, in essence, is what the Commission on Human Settlements has concluded in proposing the adoption of a global strategy for shelter to the year 2000. If we are to solve the problem confronting us, there is no alternative.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on this item be closed at 12 noon today.

If I hear no objection, it will be so decided.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): I therefore request those representatives who wish to participate in the debate to put their names on the list as soon as possible.

(The President)

I call on the Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements and Minister for Territorial and Human Settlements Development of Bulgaria, Comrade Stefan Staynov.

Mr. STAYNOV (Bulgaria), Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements (interpretation from French): I should like to express my gratitude at being permitted to participate in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission on Human Settlements in the work of the forty-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

One hundred and six countries sent delegations to the tenth anniversary meeting of our Commission and 46 of them were headed by Ministers. These figures - and this was the first time that we had had such high figures - demonstrate the importance attached by Member States of the United Nations to the work of Habitat. Since General Assembly resolution 41/189 opened the session to all Members of the United Nations whether or not they were members of the Commission, the discussion of the problems which are the object of Habitat activities was much broader and more thorough than ever before.

This was no mere chance, for 10 years have elapsed since Vancouver. The Commission and the Habitat Centre have acquired the experience needed for an in-depth discussion and the adoption of extremely relevant documents. Also, and most important, the problems that brought us together in Vancouver, instead of fading over the years, today are even more acute than ever. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that among these problems the most acute is the problem of the homeless.

I emphasize the acuteness of this problem because the need for housing for every human being is as old as the existence of mankind. To deprive a person of his home is flagrantly to infringe his dignity. It is inconceivable that after

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

centuries of efforts, as we are about to enter the twenty-first century, when man has penetrated the secret of the atom, has conquered space and is moving towards other planets and other constellations, towards infinity in time, we have to talk about the homeless, people who have no roof over their heads, who are deprived of the warmth of a home. Yet, the existence of the homeless is a cruel fact. The number of such people is constantly increasing. The figures are indeed pitiless and impressive.

The second half of our century has rightly been called a period of revolutionary urbanization. Since 1950 the urban population has doubled in the developed countries and quadrupled in the developing countries. Already in 1980 one in six were living in a city of more than 1 million inhabitants. The statisticians were right to say "living in a city" and not "in a house". Cities, with millions of inhabitants - and not only such cities - also have millions of homeless. Today, over 1 billion individuals have no home and 100 million of them do not even have a roof over their head.

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

That is why resolution 37/221 proclaiming 1987 the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless is viewed by all as a thoroughly considered initiative and not as a mere gesture. It is regarded as a task worthy of the United Nations that once again demonstrates that this most representative of world forums' continues to tackle the urgent problems involved in creating decent living conditions for the human person. It displays courage and responsibility, for the world community has set itself the task of solving in a historically short period of time - by the year 2000 - a problem mankind has not succeeded in coming to grips with throughout history.

The very scope of the problem quite naturally raises the question of whether the task the United Nations has set for itself in proclaiming this year the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless can in fact be successfully carried out. Of course, a definitive answer to the question will not be available for two or three decades. But on the basis of the analysis carried out at the tenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, I can today give this question a positive answer. To bolster my assertion, I shall recall the tasks we have set ourselves and put before the General Assembly the assessment of what has already been done and the work scheduled carried out in the next stage.

The goals and objectives of the International Year as defined in 1982 by the General Assembly and specified the following year in resolution 5/14 of the Commission on Human Settlements can be briefly summed up as follows: awareness of the scope and of the social and political significance of the problem; the formulation of national policies and programmes to solve the housing problem with special attention to measures which, in 1987, are to ensure better housing in those areas where the poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of the population live; the

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

establishment and development of international co-operation in the field of housing; the elaboration and implementation of strategies and programmes designed to obtain the final goal, namely, providing housing and services to all the homeless by the year 2000.

In order to attain these objectives, several projects and plans have been prepared and measures taken by countries. A prior assessment of results was carried out at the tenth session of the Commission, the final assessment to be provided at the special session to be held in 1988 in New Delhi. Written reports submitted by countries give us an impressive picture of what has been done in the area of programming, planning and legislative initiatives; in mobilizing financial, human and material resources; in taking practical actions and implementing pilot projects - all of which is designed to step up efforts made by the local authorities and the people themselves, enhance the role of the State, draw in organizations in the private sector and promote bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

All of these initiatives proceed from a single common idea: to ensure, through comparative analysis of the results as regards models and experience gained in the area of building housing, the possibility of finding the best approaches suited to the varied and specific conditions of the housing problem in various countries.

A correct analysis of what has already been done would provide the basis for the developing countries to draw up new programmes to improve, by the year 2000, living conditions for the poor and the homeless. In other words, we find ourselves at a stage where concrete action has to be taken to achieve the long-term programmes. It is generally considered that these programmes must be an integral

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

part of the overall programmes, that is, the socio-economic development plans of the various countries.

Then it is time to take up the next, and last, stage of the programme for the International Year, in other words, practical large-scale action designed to resolve completely the problem of the homeless by the year 2000. My recalling the actions taken at the national level would be incomplete if I did not mention the national co-ordinating centres set up by 139 countries and their role in promoting national initiatives and acting as clearing-houses for international information.

At this point I should like to speak of what has been done at the international level. That the Commission on Human Settlements can report to the General Assembly that some progress has been made in the tasks set out for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless is largely due to particularly active, consistent and inspired work done by the United Nations Centre on Human Settlements (Habitat) and to the efforts made by its Executive Director, Arcot Ramatchandran. There was also active assistance for all the national efforts; and through technical co-operation 167 pilot projects were executed in 83 countries. There was also applied scientific research on various aspects of the housing problems - which was made available to all interested countries. There were systematic efforts for the training of the cadres needed by the developing countries, and the establishment and development of information services. I should like from this rostrum to express our deeply felt thanks for all these activities.

The support and direct participation of other bodies within the United Nations system is also a significant contribution in respect of what has already been done to carry out the tasks of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and also for the next stages. Indeed, they have not only changed some of their

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

projects but also created new projects dealing specifically with these problems. This is true of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This is not an exhaustive list because, in addition, we should mention and indeed thank other bodies within the United Nations system that made contributions, not to mention a long list of non-governmental organizations.

Experience confirms that the overall solution to the housing problem can be provided only within the context of a global strategy for human settlements. However acute the problem of providing shelter to hundreds of millions of people, the problem of housing cannot and must not be confined simply to providing a roof. It has to be looked at in the broader context of the development of human settlements, and it necessarily includes, in addition to housing, the workplace, services, recreation space - in other words, creating a human environment where people not only have a roof over their head but also the opportunity of total fulfilment socially.

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

That means - on the basis of the lasting humanitarian principles adopted at the Vancouver Conference, and taking account of the new conditions - ensuring overall planning and development of human settlements that can satisfy current and future needs of people for housing, employment, health care, education and everything else that makes a person's life truly human.

All those matters were taken up in the second document discussed and adopted at the tenth session of the Commission: the new agenda for human settlements. That document is tantamount to a programme, and served as the basis for the medium-term plan for the Commission's work. The new agenda for human settlements and the long-term programme for the International Year complement one another and are mutually enriching with their new functions, constituting the basis for harmonious planning of a framework for life. It was therefore greatly appreciated by all the delegations that took part in the tenth session of the Commission.

It seems to me impossible, if not meaningless, to envisage solving the problems of human settlement development in future without extending international co-operation into all areas relating to problems of the habitat at all levels and involving all organizations entrusted with the problems of human settlements, on the one hand, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on the other.

We must therefore emphasize that an essential aspect of the work of Habitat is technical assistance to developing countries. This confirms the correctness of the recommendation adopted by over 100 Governments at the tenth session that we must continue to strengthen and develop the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements so as to carry out successfully and correctly its particularly important tasks, set by the international community.

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

I trust that the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council will take duly into account in its in-depth study of the economic and social bodies of the United Nations the views expressed by the Commission on Human Settlements in its resolution 10/20, and that the General Assembly will adopt, in accordance with its rules of procedure, resolution 10/1, adopted by the Commission and submitted to the General Assembly, on the global strategy for housing to the year 2000. As Chairman of the Commission at its tenth session, I formally ask the General Assembly to be kind enough to adopt that resolution.

At the Commission's tenth session delegations unanimously declared that solving the housing problem at the world level required the removal of conditions that create and perpetuate it. In other words, the problems and tasks involved in the future development of human settlements cannot be considered - still less resolved - outside the context of the present state of international relations at both the political and the economic levels. The great majority of delegations at the session clearly emphasized that the decisive pre-condition was undeniably removal of the threat posed by the destructive forces of the human spirit: an end must be put to the arms race. They said that peace was the paramount pre-condition for the creation and protection of the material and spiritual elements of a framework for harmonious life, which is truly indispensable for every individual. Not only will lasting peace enable man to reach the heights of which he dreams, but it will also free enormous financial resources to solve mankind's housing problem, the problem of housing for all human beings, whatever their race, nationality, creed or social status.

That was recently confirmed here in New York at the United Nations Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development. The questions discussed

(Mr. Staynov, Chairman, Commission
on Human Settlements)

and the decisions taken by that forum certainly directly involve the work of the Commission and Habitat. Moreover, they are directly related to the implementation of the principles of the Vancouver Declaration.

At the beginning of my statement I asked rhetorically whether the work that the United Nations set itself when it proclaimed 1987 the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless could be done successfully, and I have answered "Yes". To what I have said in support of that answer, I wish to add hope and optimism.

The forty-second session of the Assembly has already rightly been called the session of hope. I subscribe to that, because of my personal credo as an architect-builder, whose profession is in its very nature and essence the antithesis of destruction. That profession lifts mankind up and inspires optimism through its work. I also wish to express my deeply held conviction that mankind will enter the twenty-first century united by the only possible option: lasting peace and the imagination to create, protect and make flourish a framework for harmonious and humane life on Earth.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): I now call on the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Mr. R. Premadasa, who has expressed the wish to make an address on the item under consideration.

Mr. Premadasa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. PREMADASA (Sri Lanka) (spoke in Sinhalese; English text furnished by the delegation): Today we are convened in a special meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to commemorate the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless - 1987. This is a unique occasion for the world community. It signifies and gives expression to our collective commitment to a better tomorrow. The presence of so many distinguished representatives with expertise and experience in the field of shelter dignifies this occasion. To everyone here I bring the personal felicitations of His Excellency Mr. J. R. Jayewardene, the President of Sri Lanka.

At this moment, when we should be discussing housing development with tranquillity, my heart is saddened; my eyes fill with tears; a cold shudder runs through my body. This is because of the tragic acts of terrorism which have resulted in not only the destruction of thousands of shelters, but also the loss of thousands of lives in Sri Lanka. On this occasion, I should like to make a plea to the Assembly. I should like it to divert its attention to my motherland, Sri Lanka; to Sri Lanka, which is an independent, sovereign and unitary country, a country which has earned its rightful place in the United Nations, in the Non-Aligned Movement, in the Commonwealth of Nations and in the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation.

I urge the Assembly to divert its attention to Sri Lanka, which introduced the concept of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. I want it to open its eyes to the dastardly acts of terrorist violence perpetrated by terrorists who are being assisted and sheltered from outside our shores. I want the Assembly to understand fully the manner in which innocent families, together with their children, have been thrown out of their homes, the manner in which their houses have been set on fire and razed to the ground. In the face of such acts, which are dastardly, barbarous and unjust, can a United Nations assembly of this stature

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to what is happening in Sri Lanka? Where else can we make representations against this grave injustice other than at this world assembly?

Terrorism in Sri Lanka is not aimed at finding a solution to an ethnic problem. Terrorism in Sri Lanka is not intended to gain human rights. It is now established beyond any doubt that terrorism in Sri Lanka is aimed at destroying democratic systems, tearing up the country into bits and pieces and murdering innocent people. At least we are relieved by the fact that this truth, this absolute truth, has now been realized by the civilized democratic world. Now everyone has come to recognize who the cunning parents are who fostered, who nurtured, who sheltered and who armed these mischievous and murderous miscreants. Undoubtedly those responsible will be subjected to the condemnation and the ridicule of the entire world community.

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)(continued in English)

Seven years ago, at the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1980, Sri Lanka proposed the concept of a selected year to focus on shelter. We did that because the great industrial and agricultural development visions tended to bypass the nexus of human development - the home. Citizens of developing countries in particular have a long and strong family attachment to the traditional home. Thus, poor housing and substandard dwellings affect the very soul of our societies.

The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless was born out of that concern. However, there was also another fundamental assumption that guided our understanding of the importance of an international year, namely our belief in the value of individual effort. We were conscious of the fact that the personalized involvement of ordinary men and women could solve national problems. This is more so when the masses are motivated, mobilized and disciplined. Our perception of the International Year reached far beyond mere construction programmes. We saw it then as a new moral order transcending ideological, political and social barriers.

Since the adoption of the proposal for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, remarkable changes have taken place in the context of development. It is now increasingly evident that shelter can become a new organizing principle for development. In the less affluent areas of the world, at least 100 million people are without homes. Hundreds of millions of others live in substandard or obsolete housing. The grand designs of economic strategies scarcely touched this devastating plight of the poor and ill-sheltered. However, in a short span of time housing has become both a catalyst and a stimulus. It has shown promise as a new development effort that will address and redress this condition.

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

I say this not as an abstraction of theory. I speak from the crucible of experience. In the past decade, we have built well over half a million housing units in Sri Lanka. The One Million Houses Programme, which was launched in 1984, has made steady progress. We hope to complete this one-million target in 1989.

Our motto is minimum intervention by the State and maximum participation of the people. Our end objective is the creation of a house-owning democracy in Sri Lanka. In a display of self-help and self-confidence our people have accepted the challenge, and there has been a release of mass creative energies; we have thus reduced the direct cost to the State of an average family dwelling to \$US 200 in rural areas and \$US 400 in cities. Our efforts are far from perfect and far from complete; and we have much further to go. However, what successes we have had illustrate the value of embracing the central themes implicit in the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. What we have accomplished is largely due to the imagination and labour of ordinary men and women fired with the vision of ownership through personal dedication.

The spirit of the Year of Shelter must not terminate at the end of 1987. The International Year has given us an opportunity to put aside, at least in the area of human settlements, the diverse divisive issues - divisive issues of ideologies, political systems, economic conflict and the arms race. It has allowed us to demonstrate that the global community of nations can work together. If we can sustain the encouraging momentum of the International Year, we can perhaps prove that this ethic of national and planetary co-operation can be extended into other areas of human concern.

That is why the efforts of the International Year must continue if they are to realize both our more immediate developmental objectives and our large visions. Our visions must be lasting if they are to have purpose. To this end, I have

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

submitted five specific proposals to the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements.

First, my proposal for the extension of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless to a global programme targeted to assure shelter for all by the year 2000 has received wide support. My second proposal calls for the creation of an independent international credit institution - a global housing and shelter bank. The third proposal, the initiation of regional research groups on regional settlement approaches, technology sharing, and shelter education, is being actively pursued. My fourth proposal is of immediate relevance to the developing countries. It calls for the commencement of an international pledging system to accelerate settlement building, develop long-range forecasts and strategies, and create a sense of global accountability. My fifth proposal calls for the establishment of a specialized agency or international institution within the United Nations system solely devoted to the promotion of shelter and allied activities.

These five proposals are the building blocks for a new international spatial order - a massive effort for social justice and development, giving priority to housing and living space. Such an effort, co-ordinated and monitored through the United Nations, can provide the vital thrust for development. This will constitute the most sought-after link between the inadequacies of the present and the delivery of satisfaction to the global masses in the future.

A new international spatial order would have a transcending impact on human values and aspirations. It could give new life to that old and central institution called the family, the most primary of all human organizations. It could provide and engender a multitude of other development efforts. Above all, it could bring a vibrancy to life in the poorest regions of our planet and hope to those who live there.

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

In the name of all those who look for a better life, in the name of all those who seek development and not dependency, I call on this Assembly to endorse the concept of a new international spatial order and to undertake appropriate institutional planning that will make this vision a reality. That would be a monument to the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and a beacon for the future.

Those of us who are committed to providing shelter must remember that our efforts do not take place in isolation from the overall context of world events. In many ways housing is a barometer of global security, so our concerns must also embrace those issues which determine the destiny of mankind. The security or insecurity of nations is not lodged in the plenitude or paucity of armaments alone. We must not forget other forms of security: political, economic and cultural.

Two years ago, when I addressed the fortieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, I urged the United States of America and the Soviet Union to agree to a reduction of military expenditure by 10 per cent each year for five consecutive years, beginning in 1987. Such restraint could make available over \$US 60 billion for creative and life-sustaining investments in development. As long as the arms race persists the dreadful prospect of a war of universal destruction remains a clear possibility.

We are happy to note that the United Nations Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development just concluded has recognized these imperatives. There is a clear causal connection between arms expenditures and the shortfall of capital for development. That is why we should support any accord aimed at diminishing arms expenditure. We must work together to end this most

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

unpredictable system where the security of many is held hostage to the ambitions of a few. It is in this spirit that we welcome both the declarations of the United Nations Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development and the preliminary progress made in the area of super-Power arms reduction.

In today's world there is an unfortunate tendency for large countries to seek psychological and physical advantage at the expense of smaller and weaker States. Such large and often predatory nations need to be reminded of the fundamental principles of the United Nations: that might does not make right; that relations between nations must be based on the concept that the sovereignty of States is inviolable and that dealings between legitimate Governments must be based on reciprocity and non-interference in internal affairs. Any attempt to abridge these principles is surely not in keeping with the United Nations Charter. Such attempts are out of step with the dictates of public morality bequeathed to us by such great sages as Mahatma Gandhi. We must not lose or pervert this heritage in the quest for strategic advantages or political supremacy.

The quest for political security needs to be accompanied by a search for economic stability and cultural integrity. We are now almost two generations into the post-colonial world, yet patterns established in times of colonialism remain deeply rooted in our physical environment and our external relations. Imbalances of trade, debt burdens and inadequate rates of growth reflect many of the structural patterns of the past. We also need to be sensitive to waves of cultural assault which endanger the traditions and the ways of life of old societies. Paradoxically, the persistence of old patterns in economics and the intrusion of social modernizations combine to destabilize and degrade a large part of our world.

What protection have we from these threats and infringements? I believe that the answer rests in the capacity of each country to accentuate the ethic of

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

self-reliance. We must involve our people in the mental and physical dynamics of self-development. If the disadvantaged nations of the world can create the necessary grass-roots mobilization and maintain a sense of discipline in nation-building, a large part of these global problems can be resolved. If the affluent nations of the world realize that the good life of plenty cannot be long sustained at the expense of mass deprivation, a new partnership for development can be forged. This is the message of all the great faiths of humanity. It is a call we ignore at our peril.

(Mr. Premadasa, Sri Lanka)

We stand at the crossroads of history. We, the peoples of the planet Earth, the only known species of human life in the universe, are heirs to a mixed legacy. Great creativity has elevated a large part of our heritage and nourished it with the ideals of compassion and caring. Great destruction is also within the provenance of human capability. Today, these forces of creativity and destruction contend on a scale unknown in the past. On the outcome will rest the destiny of humankind.

As we reflect on this commemoration of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless - our own contribution to weighing the scales of history on the side of creativity - let us take guidance and inspiration from the teachings of the great spiritual leaders of the ages. Without exception, Lord Buddha, Lord Krishna, Lord Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed preached the message of social upliftment. They spoke with one voice on issues of human concern and welfare. Lord Buddha expressed it in the Sutta Nipata: Ekam hi saccam na dutiyam atthi - truth is one; there is no second.

That truth is contained in the high ideals of the International Year. As we work towards its upliftment, let us join hands in the spirit of fraternity that will make this International Year a memorable beginning, the beginning of a long march for a better life in a saner world. As the Charter of the United Nations enjoins us, let us "reaffirm faith ... in the dignity and worth of the human person ... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". To that commitment, let us dedicate our work and ourselves.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka for his statement.

Mr. Premadasa, Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the rostrum.

Mr. McINNES (Canada): I feel privileged to have the opportunity to speak to the Assembly today about the problem of homelessness and the outlook for dealing with this stubborn and complex issue, for today is Thanksgiving in my country. Thanksgiving is a special holiday celebrated by everyone, a time when we give thanks for the bounties of our rich and beautiful country.

It is very appropriate, then, that I should speak to the Assembly today about the issues surrounding the homeless. For Thanksgiving is also a time to reflect upon those less fortunate than ourselves, both at home and abroad. It is a time to take stock of our progress over the year and to look ahead to achieving even more. Today's discussions are an important initial step.

This debate is important for three reasons. First, it observes the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and allows us to focus on the plight of millions of people who have inadequate housing or no shelter at all. Secondly, it marks the tenth anniversary of the creation of Habitat and the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, through which it is possible for the nations of the world to work together for a better human environment. Thirdly, the provision of shelter is intrinsic to human dignity and living conditions without which there is human misery and the potential for unrest and conflict.

It was with a sense of urgency and impending disaster that the United Nations declared the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The wisdom of that decision was recognized by members of this Assembly whose Governments have, in the aggregate, sponsored 360 demonstration projects in their own countries in support of the objectives of the International Year. The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless is not just a token expression of concern. It is an investment in this planet's future.

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

Canada has had more than ordinary interest in the world's housing problems for a long time. The sponsorship of Habitat 76 in Vancouver was an expression of it. This gathering captured the world's interest in the emerging crisis of housing. The most precious legacy of Habitat 76 was the creation of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements and the Habitat Centre in Nairobi, the products of whose work we have before us today.

An important part of that work is the formulation of a resolution on global strategy for shelter to the year 2000. Canada heartily endorses this resolution. I hope the General Assembly will ask the Commission on Human Settlements to formulate an acceptable plan to implement the global strategy and to submit it through the Economic and Social Council for adoption by the General Assembly.

Canada equally supports the resolution on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The momentum gained this year obviously should not be lost. It is therefore important that the decisions and commitments made be integrated into the regular work of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements.

Canada has been impressed with the new agenda for human settlements. This agenda is an example of the valuable kind of work done by United Nations agencies in distilling the diverse experiences of all its members to produce realistic guidelines for the future. Canada strongly favours action based on constant policy review and innovation to forestall recurring crises.

The Nairobi session of the Commission for Human Settlements, marking its tenth anniversary, was productive. Canada supports the work programme for the two years immediately ahead of us, as well as the medium-term plan carrying us from 1990 to 1995.

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

Although I will not take the time to review all the specific draft resolutions of the United Nations considered at the tenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, I should like to note Canada's strong support for the one relating to co-ordination between United Nations agencies. We believe in Habitat's full and equal membership in the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination as soon as feasible. Until that is achieved there should be interim arrangements to ensure sound co-ordination within the United Nations system on matters relating to human settlements.

So far I have merely touched on the most important draft resolutions and recommendations before us. These will be dealt with more comprehensively by other members of my delegation in committee. I should now like to turn more generally to the lessons of this International Year and to our joint experience in shelter and human settlements.

I will not repeat those oft-quoted statistics, so shocking that it is still hard for us to comprehend their full meaning. The size of the shelter problem and the enormity of future urbanization can lead to a sense of cynicism and hopelessness. Indeed, the cynics may ask what really has been achieved with all the time, talent and money put into international and national problems of shelter since Habitat 76. Even those of us most committed to the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements must admit that the problem is far worse than when we started, and no one in the world seriously expects to see the day when all the problems of housing and settlements are solved.

And yet I think we are entitled to more optimism today than ever before. There are some real prospects of progress.

My first reason for optimism is that, staggering as is the need for resources to solve the world's physical problems of living, the resources needed do exist. My colleague Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs recently reminded

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development that the world spends \$1 trillion, or 6 per cent of world output, on arms. This figure stands in stark contrast to the urgent need, particularly in the developing countries, to meet basic human needs, including the need for adequate housing. What is required is the exercise of the political will by all States to reduce this shockingly high level of resources devoted to military-related activities.

This summer saw another meeting that gave ground for hope - that of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, where a rare international consensus was reached on the relationship between debt and trade.

Moreover, a recent dramatic development for those of us who wish to see hope in this world was the understanding reached by representatives of the United States and the Soviet Union on the withdrawal of medium-range nuclear missiles. We hope that this is the beginning of a process in which there will be increasing moves towards disarmament and peace.

Given the world's limited resources, a global reduction of military spending could make additional resources available to meet pressing socio-economic needs.

There is, then, slightly more possibility today than yesterday that resources might be available to do something about shelter and settlements. But, if the resources were there, would they be used for these purposes? That is another cause for cautious optimism. Habitat 76 and the ensuing work of the Commission on Human Settlements have had their influence. Perhaps it would be going too far to say that shelter and settlements are now on the international political agenda, but they are getting there. Today's meetings are something of a milestone, an acknowledgement that shelter and settlements have been given a higher international priority than ever before.

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

I believe that we are also entitled to some optimism over the way in which resources for shelter and settlements are likely to be used when money is available. We have been learning lessons about building houses. I do not mean only that technology has been advancing, though it is undoubtedly true that technology can play a positive part in the most modest shelter as well as in vast engineering products; I mean the way in which we approach building.

It was not long ago that in most parts of the world the conventional way to get houses built in a crisis was to have Governments build them. Today in Canada the Federal Government almost never builds houses, but it facilitates house-building by the private sector. Even for social housing for those on limited income the Federal and provincial or local governments co-operate in providing money, but construction is generally undertaken by private interests. This system, which reflects our faith in the private enterprise system, has worked well for us.

Over the past generation, however, there has been a marked tendency in Canada to involve more and more of the people who will use housing in the self-help process of housing production and to incorporate the experience in social housing and special concerns in providing for the needs of the community. This principle of consumer involvement is being recognized in both developing and developed countries.

Where public funds are far too small to make a substantial impact on shelter needs, the inadequacies of shelter in squatter settlements can best be reduced by the consumer's becoming the producer of his own shelter requirements. In such circumstances, Government resources are best employed in providing land, basic infrastructure and services, training and related enabling legislation.

This conviction is born of the Canadian experience from our earliest days in pushing back the frontier. Our pioneers were given land, tools and sometimes a

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

little money. Not only their ingenuity and hard work, but also their sense of involvement and feeling of community produced more than adequate shelter.

Mutual self-help generally means a community effort in which people pool their talents and resources to build together better than they can build alone. Mutual self-help also extends across international borders.

The plight of people living with no shelter, or with shelter which is a hazard to their health, is one problem. No less a problem is the management of cities as the human race becomes predominantly urban for the first time in the planet's history. The problem of housing in such places is bad enough. But perhaps even worse is the complexity of running the cities themselves: providing transportation, safe water, proper sanitation and at least some level of amenities, while trying to raise revenues to support them. In most of the countries where megacities have grown not only are there few resources to provide necessary infrastructure, but there is all too little experience in managing cities of any kind. The fact that this problem does not as readily translate into images of desperately suffering people in no way lessens the crisis in running settlements.

(Mr. McInnes, Canada)

Many Canadian cities and towns are aware of this situation and are doing something about it. The twinning of cities in Canada and the developing world is gathering momentum. We have now begun professional exchanges, with civic administrators from the developing world coming to Canada to see how we run our cities, to learn from our successes and from our mistakes. Experienced Canadian administrators are volunteering to spend time in the developing world to help their colleagues draw up plans to cope with the urban crises which are easily foreseen but not easily solved.

These, then, are some reasons for optimism as we look at the staggering problems of shelter and settlement across the world. Canada fully realizes the magnitude of these problems. We cannot escape the fact that they are rapidly growing worse. The statistical projections of human misery are almost beyond the mind to grasp. On the other hand, it would be a tragic mistake to begin thinking the problems are so great, the disasters so inevitable that they are beyond the capacity of the United Nations, or of any other human intervention, to affect.

We can help. Realistically, we can at least reduce human misery. We are making progress in producing shelter for the homeless. The work of this special Year has not been in vain. We can build on the hard and effective work of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements. If, individually and together, we show the political will, we can pursue practical ways towards fulfilling the vision we shared at Habitat in Vancouver 10 years ago, a vision which must be extended into the next decade.

Mr. ENDREFFY (Hungary): The socialist countries, for which I have the honour to speak - the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the German Democratic Republic, the Hungarian People's Republic, the Mongolian People's Republic, the

(Mr. Endreffy, Hungary)

Polish People's Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - consider the observance of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless to be an important means of mobilizing efforts, primarily at the national level, to provide shelter for the homeless in countries where this problem exists. The observance of the Year has served a useful purpose also in focusing the attention of the international community on the importance of developing equal and mutually advantageous co-operation in the fields of town planning and architecture, wider dissemination of information about achievements in these areas, and exchange of experience in the solution of housing problems in different countries.

The results of the work done within the framework of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, observed in accordance with General Assembly resolution 37/221, is convincing proof of the urgent need for continuing efforts in this direction, realizing the existing plans and projects for the satisfaction of the housing needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, and exploring means of, and potential resources for, attaining the noble goals of the Year. A useful contribution to the observance of the Year and the development of international co-operation in the field of human settlements is made by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).

The socialist countries have supported the adoption by the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements of the Global Strategy for providing shelter for all in the world by the year 2000. The Strategy has formulated several important guidelines for the solution of this complex socio-economic problem. The speedy achievement of the noble goals of the Strategy requires conditions of peace, disarmament and international security, as well as implementation of the principles of justice and democracy in economic relations at both the global and national

(Mr. Endreffy, Hungary)

levels. Our countries have put forward and soundly substantiated the idea of creating an international fund called "Disarmament for Development", which could play a decisive role in redirecting resources from military purposes to the needs of development and the solution of other socio-economic problems of our time, including the implementation of the Global Strategy.

Practical steps towards the solution of the shelter problem would provide a stimulus for the building industry and other related branches of the economy, as well as for the growth of capital investments in those sectors, thereby promoting the expansion of employment in developing countries, the increase of population incomes and the general improvement of national economies.

The socialist countries have constructively participated in the realization of the programme for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and stand ready actively to promote the implementation of the Global Strategy for providing shelter for all in the world by the year 2000.

The socialist States, on a bilateral basis and through participation in multilateral projects of co-operation, have provided manifold assistance to developing countries in housing construction for the population and the training of personnel in this field, which is a contribution to the realization of related national programmes.

The PRESIDENT: I call on the representative of Denmark, who will speak on behalf of the States members of the European Community.

Mr. BIERRING (Denmark): I have the honour to make the following statement on behalf of the European Community and its member States.

First, I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his very substantial report on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (A/42/378). It gives an excellent description of the goals and accomplishments of the Year.

(Mr. Bierring, Denmark)

It is evident that the severe economic and financial strains experienced by most developing countries in the last decade have had an adverse effect on human-settlement activities, and we share the view that there is a continued need to focus attention on these problems. We very much look forward to the results of next year's meeting of the Commission on Human Settlements, where the results of the International Year will be evaluated. In anticipation of the evaluation we are of the opinion that the Year of Shelter for the Homeless has helped focus international attention on problems of human settlement.

The two main objectives of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless were: by the end of 1987 to secure a measurable improvement in the shelter situation of the poor in developing countries and, with the year 2000 as a target, to demonstrate ways and means of improving the shelter of all the poor around the world. To be sure that the Year would prove successful it was decided to formulate an action-oriented programme containing a number of specific goals, the achievement of which would considerably improve the situation of the homeless before, during and after the Year. In general we share the Secretary-General's assessment of the Year of Shelter for the Homeless and are pleased that it has succeeded in raising international awareness of the problems of the homeless and, in addition, advancing the specific goals. However, large problems still remain and continued attention to them is necessary.

With regard to the accomplishment of the goals at the national level, we find it very positive that a number of developing countries have established shelter strategies and will urge others to do the same.

The importance of co-operation between the private and the public sectors in the area of providing shelter as well as the valuable participation of non-governmental organizations is also underlined in the Secretary-General's report, and we find it important that this co-operation be further extended.

(Mr. Bierring, Denmark)

Being a focal point for shelter-related activities in the United Nations system, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has at the international level fully supported the objectives of the Year. We attach importance to the task of the Commission on Human Settlements. Consequently, in April of this year the majority of Member States participated in the tenth session of the Commission and took part in the important debate on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and the ensuing adoption of relevant resolutions and decisions. It has become clear that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has made significant efforts to improve co-operation between States and co-ordination within the United Nations system. Further improvements of the co-ordinative role of Habitat remains necessary for the coming years.

All the States members of the Community have always supported the ideas and the aims behind the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and have been active in promoting these ideas during the Year. We shall continue to do so. Public awareness of the serious problems involved has been heightened through numerous activities and events, including exhibitions and the publication of books, articles and reports. In addition, the Year has served as an important stimulus for new discussions at the policy level on the broader issue of human settlements.

The provision of shelter for the poor and disadvantaged is not a task that falls only on developing countries. The need to take a fresh look at human-settlement policies and development co-operation policies has become increasingly apparent in all countries owing to the increased attention aroused by the United Nations, and particularly Habitat.

The Year has helped to raise public consciousness of the serious problems facing the homeless. More authorities and planners, more decision-makers have had the benefit of the intellectual input coming from the initiative stressing the

(Mr. Bierring, Denmark)

importance of shelter in improving health and well-being, employment, industrial development, the environment and overall national economic and social development. We shall continue to address the problems and try to maintain the momentum created during the Year.

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and its Executive Director are to be congratulated on their very effective implementation of the decisions of the General Assembly and of the Commission on Human Settlements on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. We should also like to commend the actions taken by the Executive Director with a view to ensuring the effective follow-up of the full integration of the activities of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in the regular work programme of Habitat, upon the formal termination of the International Year on 31 December 1987.

Mr. NOORANI (Pakistan): Pakistan greatly welcomed the designation of 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. It will help focus the attention of the international community on a fundamental aspect of human living conditions. We also congratulate the Government of Sri Lanka on its thoughtful initiative in bringing this subject to the United Nations. The import of this subject goes far beyond its significance as a social welfare measure. It carries implications for the political, social and economic development of countries. The provision of housing to the shelterless is therefore becoming an increasingly important responsibility of Governments, particularly in the developing countries with low incomes or large populations.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs in undertaking the comprehensive report "Housing and economic adjustments in the 1980s". The preliminary findings of the report already point to its value and usefulness, especially for the policy-makers and planners of the

(Mr. Noorani, Pakistan)

developing world. A scientific study, such as that being contemplated, would help to give them a better idea of the diverse sets of policies and options which are available in this vital sector, enabling them to select approaches most suited to their national environments and circumstances as well as to make judicious use of their limited resources.

An important area to be examined by the report is the linkage between housing policies and developmental activities. A correct appreciation of the role of housing and development could help in deciding appropriate adjustments or initiating efforts to stimulate complementary sectors which could contribute to the overall invigoration and revitalization of economies.

We believe that economic, social and political concerns are interrelated. An overall policy must reflect a balanced, integrated and comprehensive approach.

(Mr. Noorani, Pakistan)

An important measure such as housing for the shelterless would invariably contribute towards creating a positive socio-political environment conducive to economic growth. Assurance of shelter can have a tremendous impact on the total socio-economic condition of an individual or a family, enhancing their productive capacity and absorbing them in the mainstream of economic activity.

To reflect his firm commitment to the betterment of the living conditions of our people, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Mohammad Khan Junejo, included "housing for the shelterless" as one of the points in his Five-Point Political Programme. In pursuance of that programme, the Government of Pakistan has already taken several concrete steps which are bringing about a quiet transformation in the life of the common people, the landscape of our cities and, in particular, the rural villages.

The main thrust of the Prime Minister's plan is to provide housing for people belonging to low-income groups on an urgent basis and to ensure that by 1990 family units belonging to all segments of the population own a place of residence. Furthermore, the plan envisages improvement and development of areas in the cities where low-income groups have found habitation. Some of the major steps being taken on an urgent basis as part of the overall plan are as follows: first, creation of 2.2 million residential plots for allotment to families without houses in the rural areas. These are known as the Seven Marla Schemes. The sum of 500 million rupees has been allocated for the development of this scheme. About 500,000 poor and shelterless people in the rural areas are already being provided with these residential plots and also facilities to build their own homes on them. Second, improvement and development of slum areas in the cities, known as Katchi Abadis, where nearly 25 per cent of the urban population lives. For this purpose, 730 million rupees have been allocated. The dwellers in these areas are being

(Mr. Noorani, Pakistan)

given proprietary rights. Simultaneously, a major improvement programme for the provision of basic facilities in these areas is under way. The programme is proceeding in phases.

As an outcome of this programme, the Government is expecting that the slums, where 25 per cent of the urban population is living, would be transformed into clean and organized localities with adequate amenities of life as is their right. Similarly, by 1990, 2.2 million shelterless rural families would be able to own land on which to build homes. These measures coupled with widespread rural-based economic development programmes would also help to reduce pressure on the cities resulting from the phenomenon of the migration of the rural population into the cities, a phenomenon which afflicts many developing nations.

I have given these details to underline the importance given by the Government of Pakistan to the task of providing housing to the shelterless. The earnestness with which we are pursuing this policy reflects the sensitivity of the Government to the basic concerns of the people. Gradually a great change is taking place in the life of our people as a result of the high priority attached by the Government to the social sector along with a balanced and rapid growth of the economy.

In the overall policy housing for the shelterless occupies a prominent place, but we do not pursue it in isolation. A comprehensive and co-ordinated approach, which simultaneously ensures progress in the health and education sectors and in the creation of job opportunities, is necessary for stable and balanced development.

The magnitude of the problem especially for countries with low incomes or large populations, the impact of large-scale housing schemes on ecology and the attendant social and demographic consequences, merit international attention. Enhanced international activity focusing on study and research in the housing and ecological sectors can greatly assist countries such as ours to do the right

(Mr. Noorani, Pakistan)

planning and to pursue appropriate policies. The contribution of agencies such as Habitat in accumulating and organizing international experience in these fields is commendable. We fully support the role of the United Nations in this vital sector and desire its strengthening because of its direct relevance to the welfare and betterment of the living conditions of a large part of the human population.

Mr. YUSOF (Malaysia): This Assembly Hall has been the venue - and those assembled here the audience - for many urgent and passionate cries for the "right to life" for the hungry, the poor and the homeless.

It was in this Assembly Hall that we adopted, in December 1982, resolution 37/221 proclaiming 1987 the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Two years of hard work preceded that proclamation, beginning in December 1980, when the General Assembly reaffirmed that adequate shelter and services were a basic human right.

My delegation pays special tribute to the leaders of Sri Lanka for having initiated the proposal during the fourth session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, held in Manila in 1981, to declare an International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Malaysia fully supported the proposal because we shared the same concern that the development of human settlements was not keeping pace with the demands of the situation and the problem of providing adequate shelter, particularly to the lower income group, was reaching crisis proportions. We supported the idea also because it would serve to heighten awareness and to focus the attention of the international community on the plight of the homeless both in urban and rural areas in the developing countries.

Malaysia is a developing country which advocates a property-owning democracy. As such, my country is firmly committed to the provision of adequate housing for all, particularly for the lower income group. This policy has been a regular feature of all our Five-Year Development Plans implemented since independence.

(Mr. Yusof, Malaysia)

In conformity with this strategy, and in the spirit of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, Malaysia has undertaken various activities. These include the continuation of ongoing projects with emphasis on more public and private sector low-cost housing programmes as contained in the Fifth Malaysia Plan. Other activities include the construction of long houses to accommodate families affected by development projects and the establishment of housing loan schemes amounting to a maximum of 7,500 Malaysian ringgits to each low-income family, in occupations such as fishermen, rubber tappers, farmers and other families in similar categories, in order to assist them in the construction or purchase of their own houses.

(Mr. Yusof, Malaysia)

Malaysia has also implemented several demonstration projects, which include the NADI Programme - the urban sanitation programme - in Kuala Lumpur, and a special low-cost housing programme.

The NADI Programme, which is partly funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and jointly undertaken by the Ministry of Federal Territory and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall, is based on an integrated approach to achieving the goals of eradicating poverty and restructuring society in line with the country's new economic policy. It is also designed to upgrade the capabilities of the urban poor, provide them with opportunities to solve problems and develop them into an integral part of society in Kuala Lumpur. First launched in 1980, NADI covers 30 low-income areas. In addition, the Programme provides a range of services, including the provision of health facilities, basic amenities and community and family development activities, and the development of various other kinds of commercial and handicraft training to provide employment and generate income. The urban sanitation programme is also intended to provide a suitable alternative for sewage disposal in the low-income urban communities. The feasibility study was completed in 1985, and the project is ready to be launched nation-wide as soon as funds are available.

The special low-cost housing project, which was launched in July 1986, involves the construction of 80,000 units of low-cost houses annually over the period from 1986 to 1988. The objective of this project is to generate economic growth and employment opportunities. The project emphasizes public and private sector participation, the incentives for which include the provision of 2 billion Malaysian ringgits annually by central and commercial banks for bridging and end-financing, and reduced premium for land conversion and subdivision. To

(Mr. Yusof, Malaysia)

date, a total of 246 projects, amounting to 96,138 units of low-cost houses, have already been approved, and 31,581 units are in the construction stage. Obviously, these are a small part of the national effort.

In recognition of the fact that the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless represents a plan of action before, during and after 1987, the National Steering Committee in Malaysia has planned and implemented a number of additional activities, which include: first, a seminar to mark the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, held on 30 March 1987, jointly organized by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Housing Developers' Association of Malaysia; secondly, a seminar on "Adequate Shelter - Key to Children's Prosperity", held in June 1987, jointly organized by the Ministry of Welfare and the National Welfare Council for Children and focused on the need to provide adequate shelter as appropriate for children's welfare; thirdly, a special sale of commemorative stamps for the occasion, launched on 6 April 1987, with the aim of creating an awareness of the national and global problem of providing adequate shelter, particularly for the poor, and bringing into focus the efforts of the Government in implementing the relevant development projects in this regard; and, fourthly, in response to a request by the International Year secretariat, the preparation of a monograph on the involvement of private developers in low-cost housing, which has already been completed and will be forwarded soon to the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements.

In keeping with the objectives of resolution 37/221, and as can be discerned in the various projects being undertaken, Malaysia is actively pursuing measures for, and will continue to give high priority to, meeting the need for adequate shelter of the low-income group. Under the country's Fifth Malaysia Plan - from 1986-1991 - greater emphasis is given to the concept of human settlements in the

(Mr. Yusof, Malaysia)

planning and implementation of housing projects in order to ensure the provision of the necessary economic, social and infrastructural facilities in housing areas.

My delegation has also followed with interest the many activities undertaken world-wide in observance of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The variety of activities is not only a manifestation of the interest of the Governments of many countries in observing appropriately the commemoration of the Year, but also evidence of the heightened awareness of this basic human need which the occasion has served to bring to the international community. The activities undertaken during the Year have not only focused our attention on the plight of the poor and the homeless but, more important, pointed to the need for sustained action if the world is not to be caught in yet another crisis.

Like other developing countries, Malaysia is aware of this need for sustained action and will continue to put the desired emphasis on providing adequate shelter, particularly to the low-income group, as indeed is reflected in the stress given to this vital issue in each of the country's five-year development plans. We believe that self-help is a necessary condition of the eventual success of the international strategy for the homeless.

Mr. MOYA PALENCIA (Mexico) (interpretation from Spanish): As we observe today the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless we have heard the Executive Director of Habitat say that the housing crisis is of immense dimensions and that between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the inhabitants of the major cities in the developing countries live in slums or extremely marginal areas. The death of 15 million people a year, mainly women and children, from diseases associated with the insanitary conditions in which they live cannot leave us indifferent. A decent, sanitary dwelling should be an essential part of everybody's life. It should be one of the fully guaranteed human rights.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

No system is unaffected by poverty. The economic crisis has aggravated the problem and we find homeless people in all the great cities in the developed and the developing countries. We are convinced that with international co-operation this situation can quickly be remedied.

While in the developed countries the increase in the number of homeless persons has been well publicized, in the developing world the situation is even more serious, and to it must be added the historical backwardness and earlier shortcomings. The effect of the economic crisis and the restriction of financial flows for development, and the consequences of the retrenchment carried out in many of these countries, are other factors to be added to the equation.

In order to solve the problem, what is needed is a suitable volume of resources and a coherent and co-ordinated policy that takes into account traditions and local customs, involves the participation of all sectors of the society and provides solutions to the problems of urban and rural growth and their relationship to the environment.

In 1987 we are celebrating the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The Secretary-General's report (A/42/378) reminds us of the origin and development of this idea. It was intended to emphasize the need for decent housing for the poorest, and for the international community to take measures to remedy the living conditions, which seemed to be deteriorating under the impact of the crisis.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

We agree with the Secretary-General that actions taken at the national level are not necessarily limited to a single year or may not have been carried out within that year, but rather these actions belong within the framework of broader policies and, consequently, the substance of his report should serve as highlighting the effort carried out. We also agree that the improvement of housing cannot be measured in purely quantitative terms because other aspects must be considered too, and that it would be very difficult to reflect all the experiences of the various countries in a document of that size. We believe that the report is very useful because it demonstrates the general trends.

The Secretary-General's summary includes various references to what has been done in my country; I shall expand on those references by describing in greater detail to our reconstruction effort.

First, we must emphasize the interest taken by President de la Madrid in urban development and its relation to ecological problems, which is clearly shown with the establishment for the first time in Mexico of a state secretariat of urban development and ecology. Constant vigilance in regard to these activities, whose intensity has not slackened notwithstanding the crisis, demonstrate the priority given to housing and the protection of the environment. The policy of decentralization undertaken by the Government has yielded important results. We have managed to transfer decision-making power on projects and the use of resources to the communities, thereby promoting renewed vigour and activity at that level.

Concerning human settlements, the decentralization of government offices has resulted in the partial halting or slowing down of the migration towards Mexico City and establishment of centres to attract settlers in other existing settlements.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

In September 1985 Mexico City suffered an earthquake of such a magnitude that the housing of 95,000 families was totally or partially lost. Half a million inhabitants found themselves homeless in a few seconds. As one can imagine, we were not ready to confront that kind of a problem. It was necessary to innovate and to set in motion all resources. The Mexican people organized quickly and spontaneously. Emergency shelters were set up. Rescue teams and support groups, were also set in motion and solidarity overcame many economic, social or generational differences.

The international community provided solidarity and collaboration, for which we renew our gratitude. We shall never forget the speed with which the United Nations mobilized to support Mexico's efforts.

The Government set up emergency machinery. It organized camps, hospitals, supply distribution centres, rescue operations, overseeing the safety of buildings, the demolition of unsafe structures and the removal of rubble. It proceeded to co-ordinate the activities of all existing housing bodies and various institutions that provided already completed housing or housing on the verge of completion and made available credit to their affiliates or to the victims.

But many families were not covered by this classification, mainly the inhabitants of the areas near the centre of Mexico City who refused to leave their neighbourhoods and the residents of the Nonoalco Tlatelolco housing project containing more than 10,000 families who insisted on staying in their homes.

The emergency required, above all, temporary housing. It was necessary to set up minimum health, administration and safety conditions. It was necessary to carry out work simultaneously on many fronts in high density population areas, without disturbing normal business activities.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

In a recent Habitat publication some figures are given comparing the housing situation before and after the reconstruction and showing the magnitude of the effort made. Seventy-nine per cent of housing units had less than 40 square metres, and the average was less than 22 square metres. All of the new housing units have at least 40 square metres. Sixty-two per cent of housing units did not have the minimum requirements and 25 per cent were in a severe state of deterioration. Two-thirds lacked sanitary services and 29 per cent had shared kitchens. Ninety-seven per cent of the inhabitants rented their dwellings and a majority had been in the area for more than 30 years. In many cases various families lived in the same housing unit.

We are pleased to say that half a million inhabitants of the centre of Mexico City have substantially improved their living standards: all the housing units are single family units and have sanitary facilities, laundry, kitchen, two separate rooms and a living room. All have a minimum space of 40 square metres and share playgrounds where trees have been planted and where there is plenty of sun. No building has more than three floors, given the characteristics of the sub-soil, and all of them exceed the minimum requirements of the Mexico City building codes which have been raised since the earthquake. So far 48,000 housing units have been constructed and 46,500 housing units are new, 2,300 pre-fabricated, and 6,220 were repaired and rehabilitated, including 2,500 in buildings catalogued as historical monuments.

This task would not have been possible without the resolute participation of society as a whole. Foundations and support groups of solidarity, the university community, 1,350 private enterprises, government entities and inhabitants of the area took part in the process. In the most intense phase of the work, that meant 114,000 direct jobs. The neighbours became the best inspectors of the state of progress and the quality of work at all phases of reconstruction.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

Agreement and dialogue were the means that enabled the Government of Mexico to deal with the problem and solve it. Sixty-nine organizations of persons having suffered damage to properties, neighbourhood societies and co-operative societies, 10 universities and institutions, eight technical support groups, eight colleges and chambers, and 15 foundations or similar private associations, signed with Government representatives an agreement for a democratic solution for the reconstruction which included necessary conditions for carrying out this task, establishing the terms on which the housing was to be acquired.

This meant on average eight and a half years, and payments between 20 and 30 per cent of the minimum monthly wage; beside renewal, democratization also occurred in the ownership of housing in the centre of Mexico City.

The housing designs and materials and the way we proceeded earned us a number of prizes and tributes for our reconstruction effort from certain international institutions or meetings. I refer to the World Association of Major Metropolitan Areas which paid tribute to us, the International Union of Architects which awarded the Sir Robert Mathew World Prize and the World Architectural Biennial in Sofia which also gave us an honourable mention.

The Mexican experience shows that the co-operation of the whole of society is essential for a strategy to succeed, and that dialogue and broad-based democratic agreement are the key to a solution.

We are quite convinced that without the organized and vigilant effort of the citizens and without the co-ordination and guidance of the authorities, reconstruction could not have been done so fast and so effectively.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

The solution of social problems requires a firm political will, strict utilization of resources, budgetary discipline and a determination to struggle, a spirit of solidarity such as was shown in Mexican society after the earthquakes of September 1985. Mexican strategy to resolve the problem of housing of social groups with lower income levels is based on fundamental respect for their ways of organizing their lives in society and the urban environment. It contains elements of financial disciplines which make it possible to make the maximum use of available resources and guarantee access to loans for affected social groups, and also includes a technical solution involving quality standards, orderly building and a rapid pace of conduct of the operation.

(Mr. Moya Palencia, Mexico)

We wish to offer our fullest co-operation in disseminating this experience, as well as technical advice and training that might be of interest to other members of the international community that face similar situations, because the plans and designs, the material research and the forms of organization of labour used by us could serve as a basis for providing new solutions.

In April this year we met in Nairobi for the tenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements. There we adopted proposals which are to be considered by the General Assembly at this session and which we hope will make it possible to improve the general situation of human settlements. Some of the proposals seem novel as compared with those of 10 years ago. The progress made is due to the fact that we understand better the nature of the problem and how its multidimensional nature requires the participation of all sectors and all elements of economic activity, starting, of course, with proper planning.

Human settlements policy must be designed on the basis of national characteristics and the participation of the population as a whole. It must be integrated in the development plans which each country sets for itself. Development must be viewed as a long-term endeavour with an integral approach. It deserves the support of the international community, particularly through measures to overcome the economic crisis - in other words, through an attitude of joint responsibility for the solution of problems, especially the problem of the external debt, which has become the major obstacle to development.

The elimination of injustice, unemployment, hunger, insanitary living conditions and the lack of housing is a priority in any development programme, because in marginalization and poverty lies the origin of all conflicts. Let us seek joint, agreed solutions so as to establish a new system of international economic relations based on justice and equity.

Mr. ABDOUN (Sudan) (interpretation from Arabic): The United Nations General Assembly resolution proclaiming 1987 the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless was the culmination of serious efforts on the part of the international community, for shelter is in essence a basic human right. The initiative that led to that proclamation by the General Assembly was the convening of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, in Vancouver, in 1976. The Vancouver Conference emphasized, inter alia, that questions of human settlements are international issues that call for concerted efforts so that appropriate programmes may be developed to address those problems and find suitable solutions. The international community strengthened its efforts in addressing the question of shelter when it created the Commission on Human Settlements. My delegation expresses its appreciation of the work done by the Commission within the framework of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

It was essential to establish a focal point to co-ordinate what was required of the international community, the United Nations system and local communities concerned with the question of human settlements. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements undertook that task and served as secretariat to the Commission. We wish to express satisfaction at the performance of the Centre during the period since the Vancouver Conference.

The problems facing the developing countries in the area of human settlements are particularly severe. In addition to the lack of skilled manpower, the difficult economic conditions and the scarcity of financial resources have made the provision of shelter for a large sector of urban and rural populations an extremely difficult task. Our Governments have failed to reconcile the resources available

(Mr. Abdoun, Sudan)

with those required. That has made the implementation of strategies and programmes to meet the housing needs of hundreds of millions of human beings a serious challenge.

The situation has been exacerbated by the severe natural conditions in our countries. During the 1980s large parts of Africa have been plagued by drought and desertification. Our agricultural output has been the victim of drought, forcing a large part of our population to migrate, so it was only natural that problems of shelter would assume tragic dimensions.

Despite the fact that the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless has witnessed some relative improvement in providing shelter for some of the poor, and despite the efforts of the international community, which have led to increased national and international awareness of the gravity of this problem and its vast implications for the economic and social sectors, the overall picture remains bleak in a great many of countries.

The Secretary-General indicated this in the conclusion to his report to the General Assembly (A/42/378) when he said that the scourge of homelessness and inadequate shelter was far from having been eradicated and that concerted and massive action over a period of time by Governments, organizations and individuals all acting together was called for. The many studies made have demonstrated that the improvement of shelter for millions of human beings in the developing world requires the formulation of comprehensive strategies in which housing policies could be viewed as a whole, along with the need to make radical changes in the economic and service sectors. However, the formulation of such comprehensive strategies is closely linked to the improvement of the overall economic capabilities of these nations. There is a close link between the improvement of rates of growth in the developing world and the improvement of the living conditions of the population.

(Mr. Abdoun, Sudan)

One can imagine the conditions of those countries that are faced with the need to improve shelter for more than 1 billion people at a time of constant population growth at a rate of about 80 million people a year. That makes it imperative for the international community to make ever greater efforts to increase the financial resources allocated to this sector and to pay increasing attention to the need for training and development and the exchange of know-how and expertise and enhanced exchanges among all countries.

My country has experienced important changes in the areas of housing and human settlements. The most important is the establishment of a special Ministry of Housing, whereas once this was a mere department with extremely limited resources and terms of reference. The creation of this Ministry is an important step towards formulating national policies to address the overall issues of housing and to make scientific studies for this purpose.

(Mr. Abdoun, Sudan)

The programme of action announced by my Government contains a number of important steps in this regard, foremost among which are the following: first, the modernization of population policies to go beyond the distribution of land and to implement an integrated housing plan that encourages investment in the area of housing and the construction of co-operative housing complexes, special priority being given to housing the limited-income population; secondly, the creation of a ministerial commission to review housing grants in order to bring them into line with limited-income households; thirdly, the formation of another ministerial commission to examine the national housing plan and ensure the distribution of housing lots for eligible citizens.

Notwithstanding these important achievements, my country continues to face several challenges providing shelter for large sectors of the population as a result of drought, which has forced large numbers of persons to leave their villages and urban centres and move to cities, as well as to suburbs of the national capital, creating severe problems in housing, food and sanitation and increasing the number of the homeless.

In order to address the serious dimensions of this problem, the Government has taken the following measures: first, the creation of makeshift camps to absorb refugees who go to the capital and the larger cities and to meet their basic needs; secondly, following the relative improvement in rainfall over the past two years, the Sudanese authorities have taken several steps to resettle the homeless in their villages and rural areas after improving conditions there for them; thirdly, the Government constantly makes efforts to contain the political problems in the southern part of the country that led to the movement of large numbers of persons.

(Mr. Abdoun, Sudan)

Pending success in these political initiatives they have been absorbed in special temporary camps.

The Assembly may be aware that the economic conditions now facing Sudan make it extremely difficult to find a comprehensive solution for this problem. Unless efforts are made by the world Organization, donors and non-governmental organizations to supply the aid necessary to provide adequate shelter for these homeless, it will be impossible to do so.

In conclusion, the situation facing the international community in the provision of shelter, and the need to formulate a global strategy for shelter to the year 2000, require the adoption of further measures at both the national and the international levels. In this regard, my delegation supports the broad guidelines for such measures outlined in the report of the Secretary-General now before us.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.