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ComHabitat
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Debating poverty reduction at the World Urban Forum

Two Commonwealth events will examine the issue of urban poverty and human settlements development in national poverty reduction strategies at the forthcoming World Urban Forum in Vancouver. There will be a high-level Commonwealth consultation on Sunday 18th June, which it is hoped will result in a Commonwealth statement for delivery at the Ministerial Roundtable on the following day, and for forthcoming Commonwealth Ministerial consultations on debt and finance issues. Secondly, ComHabitat is organising a networking event to explore these issues with a wider audience from civil society and local and national government.

ComHabitat research has shown that there is general lack of focus on urban poverty issues in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which prevents governments and donors being able to take advantage of the opportunities within urban areas to address poverty and meet the Millennium Development Goals (see www.comhabitat.org/research to download the research papers). The high-level consultation will provide an opportunity for Ministers to share their experiences in addressing urban poverty, and enable them to be better placed to build both national and international consensus necessary to strengthen these issues in national poverty reduction strategies.

Why is it that urban poverty, and investments in housing and infrastructure for the poor are so rarely mentioned in national poverty reduction planning? ComHabitat's networking event, to be held on Monday 19th June, will take the form of a debate to explore this question. The motion will be "*This House believes that urban development strategies are not relevant to national poverty reduction strategies*". Speakers will include senior national and local government officials, slum dwellers and NGO representatives.

If you would like more information about the events, or about ComHabitat more generally, please contact Kim Mullard on 024 7663 2802 or kim@homeless-international.org.

Notes to the Editor:

What is the CCGHS?

The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General in 1998. The CCGHS is an intergovernmental group made up of Ministers who are responsible for implementing the Habitat Agenda in their own countries. At its first meeting the CCGHS adopted a Commonwealth goal of: "Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015". The last CCGHS meeting, in April 2005, agreed that ComHabitat should seek ways to put human settlements more at the centre of the development agenda and that financing and debt issues were important concerns.

What is ComHabitat?

ComHabitat is a partnership of the intergovernmental Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) and agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector. ComHabitat aims to promote and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Commonwealth Goal and associated Millennium Development Goals within and between Commonwealth countries. It focuses on networking and sharing practical examples of progress in implementation. See www.comhabitat.org for more information.

What is the World Urban Forum?

The World Urban Forum, held every two years, was established by the United Nations to examine one of the most pressing issues facing the world today: rapid urbanization in a world where half of humanity lives in cities and where in the next 50 years that proportion is expected to reach two-thirds of the global population. Most of this urban growth is taking place in developing countries where the major challenge is to combat poverty and provide better access to basic shelter and services, like clean water and sanitation. Cities in wealthier nations also face problems of urbanization—like crumbling infrastructure, smog and social exclusion.

The Government of Canada is hosting the third session of the World Urban Forum, in Vancouver, from 19 to 23 June 2006. The main theme of the Forum is *Our Future: Sustainable Cities - Turning Ideas into Action*. See www.wuf3-fum3.ca for more information.

What is the Habitat Agenda?

The Habitat Agenda is the main document that came out of the United Nations' 1996 Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. It has been adopted by all members of the Commonwealth. The Habitat Agenda contains commitments on adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world.

What are Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers?

In order to qualify for debt relief, highly indebted poor countries must produce a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), an outline of a national programme for poverty reduction.

What are the Millennium Development Goals?

In September 2000, the United Nations unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been recognised by the United Nations General Assembly as part of the 'road map' for implementing the Millennium Declaration. See www.un.org/millenniumgoals for more information.