

League of Arab States  
General Secretariat  
Council of Arab Ministers  
of Housing and Reconstruction

**ARAB DECLARATION  
ON  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS**

( RABAT DECLARATION)

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*League of Arab States* (Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction) - December 1995 on the occasion of the UN Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II)

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**Preamble**

The Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction :

1 - *abiding* to the Charter of the League of Arab States, and in accordance with the objectives and plans of its specialized organizations, agencies and ministerial councils;

2 - *Upholding* the Charter of the United Nations Organization, and other relevant international charters related to the development and the establishment of justice, peace and security;

3 - *Recognizing* the right of people to live in freedom and security in their countries;

4 - *Proceeding* from the fact that the Arab World, the cradle of the earliest human civilizations and the birthplace of divine religions. Moreover, it possesses deep-rooted cultural and civilizational capabilities and divinely-inspired legislations stipulating the preservation of human dignity as a sacred duty;

5 - *Convinced of* human being's capability in the Arab world to proceed energetically towards achieving comprehensive national development that meets the needs and aspirations of present generations without infringing on the rights and ambitions of future generations;

6 - *Aware that* the achievement of comprehensive development in the Arab World necessitates concentration on the development of human capabilities, as well as meeting the moral and material requirements. to ensure a balance between the rights of the individual and his duties to the society;

7 - *Considering that* the geographical location and climatic conditions expose many parts of the Arab World to long periods of drought, continuous threats of desertification and degradation of the natural and built environment;

8 - *Convinced of* the importance of preserving the cultural and civilizational heritage of the Arab World, in general, and its urban and architectural heritage, in particular, and *inspired by* the values of the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage in fields of education, labour, production and justice;

9 - *Aware that* the development achieved in the Arab World, despite the unstinting efforts that have been exerted, requires further efforts to achieve the desired goals in all areas of development;

10 - *Based on* the facts that effective mobilization and sound management of all available resources, as well as consecration of the principle of non-governmental and community participation in the process of planning and decision-making, on built environment designing, habitat production and capacity building, are all fundamental conditions for achieving sustainable development of human settlements;

11 - *Confirming that* sustainable development is a continuous and uninterrupted process, requiring comprehensive review of development strategies to ensure an urban-rural balance, as well as an assessment of human settlement policies and programs of which housing is a main element;

12 - *Convinced of* the woman's effective role in the various sectors and activities in the Arab World, and of strengthening her role in achieving sustainable development of human settlements in urban and rural areas;

13 - *Aware that* urbanization, the intensity of which must be alleviated in the future, could be harnessed to achieve human welfare, prosperity and development, by endeavoring to exercise control, planning, reducing negative impacts, and directing it systematically to curb the overgrowth of mega cities and capitals, or the establishment of new mega cities;

14 - *Cognizant of* the impact of accelerated rates of urbanization, such as urban agglomeration, poverty, emergence of squatter areas, together with the impending dangers, problems and challenges in providing adequate housing, services, creating job opportunities, the maintenance and development of the infrastructure. in addition to environmental pollution and wastage of natural resources;

15 - *Aware that* poverty, in urban and rural areas, which cause of misery and suffering to large population segments, particularly among women and children, constitutes loss of valuable human resources, and a main cause of the deterioration of the built and natural environments, and constitutes a growing threat to social and political stability;

16 - *Cognizant of* the evolution in international economic relations and their impact on the development process in developing countries, including the Arab States;

17 - *Confirming that* fair and comprehensive peace is a prerequisite for the achievement of stability and sustainable development; and that peace and security can only be achieved through Israeli's withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories and the return of the refugees to their properties and houses in their towns and villages;

18 - *Clarifying* the Arab concept on sustainable development of human settlements in urban and rural areas;

19 - *Participating in* the international, regional and national efforts in preparation for the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II);

20 - *Contributing to* the drafting of the Habitat Agenda (Declaration of Principles and Commitments, and the Global Plan of Action);

The Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction confirms the following general principles and goals :

### General Principles and Goals

1 - Human being, is the objective and maker of development, and therefore, must be the center of all interests pertaining to sustainable development. Every human being has the right to live, within human settlements, a healthy and productive life, That is compatible with the religious values which advocate justice, peace, love and mutual responsibility.

2 - **The Family** is the fundamental nucleus of the society. All appropriate conditions must be provided to maintain its safety, to upgrade its living standard, to safeguard its values and solidarity, and to provide it with adequate housing, job opportunities, and a dignified living for its members, including the elderly and handicapped.

3 - **Woman** assumes a highly important role in society, not only in her capacity as a mother, but also as a fundamental contributor to sustainable development. It is imperative to provide the necessary requirements to improve her quality of life, and to ensure her participation in all phases of housing production, planning and management of human settlements, as well as the conservation of the environment.

4 - **The Child** has the fundamental right to a healthy, happy and secure life, through the provision of adequate housing, health care, education, family upbringing, recreation, and other services and favorable conditions, while ensuring that all such services be extended to children in poor and deprived areas.

5 - **The Youth**, are the main element in society's development and production, must be provided with wide-ranging opportunities to exercise their right to education and training, and to secure work and adequate housing in order to start and maintain families. They must be enabled for effective and collective participation in all activities of sustainable development.

6 - **Future Generations** have a right to natural resources and riches, the utilization of which should be rationalized to avoid waste and extravagance.

7 - **Human Rights** that are fundamentally religious, political, civil, social and cultural rights, constitute the mainstay of social security and stability, the guarantee to social equality and justice, and the solid foundation to achieve sustainable development. Such rights must be respected and safeguarded.

8 - **Adequate Housing** is a fundamental right and requirement of human being, who must be enabled to secure it in both urban and rural areas, within a healthy and sound environment, equipped with all services and utilities.

9 - **Peace and Security** are the basis of sustainable development and preservation of environment and natural resources,

without which there can be no guarantee of realizing the ambitions and aspirations of present and future generations to live in secure and sustainable urban and rural human settlements.

10 - **Popular and Collective Participation** in drawing up and reviewing policies; in decision-making, implementation, follow-up and mobilizing and domestic resources, are fundamental to the development of human settlement and the achievement of sustainable development.

11 - **Forcible Expulsion and Settlement in the Occupied Arab Territories** as confirmed by the International Community, as illegal acts, constitute a flagrant violation of human rights, a threat to regional and world peace, and an impediment to sustainable development of human settlements in the region. Therefore, the termination of such illegitimate practices would enhance the establishment of equitable and comprehensive peace in the region.

12 - **International Relations** must be founded on justice, fairness, balance, mutual respect, nonexploitation, nonaggression, and cooperation to tackle natural disasters, alleviate poverty and unemployment, as well as the endeavor to achieve socio-economic development, in addition to peace, security and justice to all peoples and countries.

Proceeding from the Principles, contained in this Declaration, and seeking to achieve the two objectives of HABITAT II :

- Adequate Shelter for All.
- Sustainable Human Settlements Development in an Urbanizing World.

We, the Arab Ministers of Housing and Reconstruction, are committed to the following :

#### Commitments

1 - To adopt comprehensive and integrated national development strategies and policies, ensuring a balance between economic, social, urbanization and environmental policies.

2 - To adopt integrated and precise urban development and urbanization policies, which concentrate on achieving balanced urban-

rural development and are oriented to the creation of small - and medium - size towns and curbing the establishment of large new cities or the overgrowth of existing mega cities.

3 - To develop the national infrastructure and strengthen the private sector, while laying down adequate control, as well as monitoring and remedying the negative socio-economic impacts of privatization and structural adjustment.

4 - To draw up comprehensive urban development policies and housing policies, based on decentralization and enablement, with the participation of all parties, including the private sector, local community groups and NGOs.

5 - To draw up land policies to secure a balance between population distribution and spread of human settlement on all lands of urbanization potential, while ensuring optimum land utilization within the framework of sustainable development.

6 - To compile a data base on the conditions, socio-economic developments, population, housing, environment and natural resources, to aid in drawing up, implementing and upgrading adequate and balanced policies, as well as utilizing modern systems and international modern criteria in this respect.

7 - To strengthen the role of the media, and to establish a media communications network to serve national, Arab and international efforts to upgrade urban-rural built environments and improve living conditions of the population.

8 - To reinforce the role of municipal and local authorities in urban and rural development, and to favor decentralized urban planning, regarding the expansion of towns and cities, land uses, and determining the required infrastructures and public utilities.

9 - To strengthen the role of women and youth, regarding participation in decision-making and in the management and development of human settlements.

10 - To promulgate the necessary legislation for providing adequate shelters to all population categories, especially legislations pertaining to preserving built and natural environment, curbing urban encroachment on agricultural land, and promoting investment in rental housing schemes.

11 - To set up and develop diverse funding mechanisms with a view to providing housing for the various low-income brackets of the population, as well as encouraging savings for housing.

12 - To reinforce programs seeking to remedy and curb squatters and/or haphazard housing.

13 - To establish real estate systems with a view to the preparation of building land areas and providing them with services and infrastructure of adequate technology; facilitating procedures of purchase, sale and registration to all citizens, together with promoting and developing ways and means for the participation of the private sector in the preparation and equipment of land.

14 - To strengthen scientific research with a view to developing adequate technologies relying on the utilization of local materials.

15 - To build up and develop capacities and skills relevant to housing, management of human settlements and lands, infrastructures, construction, and self-help housing through training, rehabilitation and orientation programs.

16 - To encourage the establishment of voluntary non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in local communities, to contribute to the ongoing efforts of poverty alleviation and the upgrading of the quality of life through income-generating programs.

17 - To utilize technologies and equipment that rationalize energy consumption for building, construction and domestic purposes, and protect the environment, together with encouraging scientific research in this area.

18 - To promulgate appropriate legislations for protecting the environment, curbing pollution, encouraging forrestation, establishing parks and green-belt areas, while emphasizing the necessity of assessing the impact on environment when designing urbanization projects.

19 - To undertake studies and surveys and establish data bases on natural disasters, potential disaster areas, frequency of occurrence, impact on population and economic activities, all of which must be taken into consideration in urban development plans. Also, to regard desertification, drought and environment pollution as wide-ranging

disasters. The International Community must be urged to participate in meeting and alleviating the impact of such contingencies .

20 - To give national priority to reconstruction and development of towns and cities damaged by wars and conflicts, and to incorporate the reconstruction policy with that for the resettlement of refugees and the displaced persons as a result of these incidents.

21 - To adopt a clear policy for safeguarding buildings and property , especially in old cities, as well as preserving the architectural heritage and historical sites, and encouraging that such a heritage be an inspiration in the designing of new houses.

22 - To give special attention to *Al Quds Al Shareef* [Jerusalem], in order to preserve its Arab-Islamic architectural character and the holy heritage of the City and protect its historical landmarks, which are registered as endangered universal cultural heritage with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

23 - To consolidate solidarity, cooperation and coordination between the Arab States and the countries of the world in all fields of development, and to utilize the appropriate existing mechanisms to secure material and technical support from the International Community, and its organizations and financial institutions, in order to achieve the sustainable development of human settlements in rural and urban areas alike.

24 - To cooperate with the International Community in the exchange of expertise and experts in the areas of reconstruction and repopulating human settlements, and also for the conservation of potable water resources and rationalizing their utilization on the domestic and regional levels.

25 - To endeavor that the Palestinian citizen, especially in *Al Quds Al Shareef* [Jerusalem], secure adequate housing, by extending assistance and support in a direct manner through international contacts in order to remove the impediments preventing it in the city of *Al Quds Al Shareef* [Jerusalem].

26 - To endeavor that citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan and Southern Lebanon exercise their legitimate rights in their lands, that their homes be not destroyed, and that displaced persons and refugees be repatriated, through termination of Israeli occupation, in accordance

with the legitimate international resolutions and the establishment of a fair, comprehensive and permanent peace.

20. To give national priority to reconstruction and development of towns and cities damaged by wars and conflicts, and to incorporate the reconstruction policy with that for the resettlement of refugees and the displaced persons as a result of these incidents.

21. To adopt a clear policy for safeguarding buildings and property, especially in old cities, as well as preserving the architectural heritage and historical sites, and encouraging that such a heritage be an inspiration in the designing of new houses.

22. To give special attention to Al-Quds Al-Sharief (Jerusalem) in order to preserve its Arab-Islamic architectural character and the holy heritage of the City and protect its historical landmarks, which are regarded as endangered universal cultural heritage with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

23. To consolidate friendly cooperation and coordination between the Arab States and the countries of the world in all fields of development, and to utilize the appropriate existing mechanisms to secure material and technical support from the International Community and its organizations and financial institutions, in order to assist the economic development of human settlements in rural and urban areas.

24. To cooperate with the International Community in the exchange of expertise and experts in the areas of reconstruction and resettling human settlements, and also for the conservation of historic water resources and intensifying their utilization at the domestic and regional levels.

25. To endeavor that the Palestinian citizens, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharief (Jerusalem), receive adequate housing, by extending existing and support in a direct manner through international contacts in order to remove the impediments preventing it in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharief (Jerusalem).

26. To endeavor that citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon exercise their legitimate rights in their lands, that their homes be not destroyed, and that displaced persons and refugees be resettled through termination of Israeli occupation in accordance