Habitat III U.S. National Committee Talking Points

About Habitat III & the U.S. National Committee

- Habitat III is the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quinto, Equador in October 2016.

- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, at the request of and in partnership with the Department of State and other Federal agencies, has convened the **U.S. National Committee** to prepare for the nation's involvement in Habitat III.

- HUD and the Department of State are striving to make this a broad and inclusive process, using this international conference as a chance to focus on our domestic opportunities.

- Chaired by HUD Secretary Julián Castro, the National Committee is comprised of over 40 organizations representing Federal government agencies, regional and local officials, academia, philanthropy, civil society and the private sector.

- The Committee's goal is to facilitate a dynamic and inclusive Habitat III preparatory process over the next 18 months that engages the members and other partners in activities designed:

    – to promote open and productive dialogue on key challenges facing U.S. cities and regions and discuss opportunities to improve quality of life, sustainability and resilience efforts;

    – to raise public awareness and engage local communities on housing, planning and community development issues in the U.S. and how they connect to global conversations; and

    – to uplift best practices and innovations emerging from rural, tribal, suburban and urban communities across the U.S.

- Three Subcommittees are being organized to execute the majority of the preparatory work. Other organizations are invited to join the efforts of these subcommittees, as they identify opportunities and work to raise issues and improve practices both domestically and internationally.

    – The **U.S. National Report Subcommittee** will contribute to and provide feedback on the U.S. National Report that will be prepared by HUD and other federal partners. The Report will evaluate the nation's progress on creating

adequate shelter for all, the goal established by Habitat II, and offer a prospective vision for sustainable urbanization and the reduction of urban poverty.

- The **Connecting the U.S. to Global Conversations Subcommittee** will serve as a liaison between the U.S. National Committee and organizations, venues and processes that will be involved and/or topics of global discussions at Habitat III. The subcommittee will elevate best practices abroad in the areas of sustainable development, climate change and other urban issues, and identify places from which the U.S. can model solutions to domestic problems.

- The **Education and Outreach Subcommittee** will be tasked with raising public awareness about urban development issues and trends in the U.S. while engaging local communities in national preparations for Habitat III. The subcommittee will identify best practices, innovations and challenges that U.S. communities and cities face while looking for ways the Habitat III planning process can support efforts to improve quality of life, sustainability and resilience efforts in cities and communities.

Habitat I, II & III

- In 1976, the United Nations convened the Habitat I conference in Vancouver, Canada, sparking an international conversation on urban issues as the world was starting to witness the greatest and fastest migration of people into cities and towns in history.

- Twenty years later in 1996, at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, Turkey, world leaders adopted the Habitat Agenda as a global action plan to create adequate shelter for all.

- In 2016, Habitat III is designed to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization and to focus on the implementation of a "New Urban Agenda" that addresses 21st Century urban challenges and harnesses the tremendous potential of cities to promote sustainable development globally.

Habitat III as a Platform for Domestic and Global Conversations about Urbanization

- It is remarkable that only a century ago, two out of ten people in the world were living in urban areas. Since then, the world has been rapidly urbanizing. [1]

- The United States recognizes the importance of urbanization in both domestic and global contexts. The majority of the U.S. population has lived in cities since the middle of the 20th century, and today, more than 80 percent of U.S. households live in urban areas. This trend continues—more than 90 percent of our population growth in the last decade occurred within cities and metropolitan areas. [2]

- Cities are central to our nation's social and cultural life, and they are where people of different histories, cultures and languages intersect in all aspects of their lives. Cities of all sizes generate new ideas and nurture innovation. The nation's urban centers, and metropolitan regions that transcend municipal and State boundaries, have also long been a primary driver of economic wealth and advances in many fields. [2]

- Cities are rich with possibility, but are also the places where the challenges of income inequality, economic and racial segregation and lack of affordability persist. [3]

Using Habitat III to Address the Nation's Agenda

- There are many reasons why people are moving to cities, but the short answer is **opportunity**. Urban living, though not without its challenges, is rich with economic, educational and social possibilities that appeal to a wide range of people.[4]

- Since taking office, President Obama has focused on dramatically **expanding access to opportunity for all Americans**. This focus has been accompanied by a new approach to governing—one that seeks to unlock individual and collective potential; that rewards results, evidence and best practices over ideology; that puts people and places over programs; that rewards work and supports skill-building; and that leverages the power unleashed when we join forces across all sectors—government, business, and non-profits, both community-based and national—recognizing we are strongest when we work together.[5]

- The U.S. National Committee will follow that stakeholder model as members discuss trends, evidence and experience with an eye to highlighting proven best practices and promising innovations.

- HUD's place-based initiatives, including the Promise Zones, Choice Neighborhoods, Strong Cities, Strong Communities and the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, are designed to **expand economic mobility and opportunity** by leveraging and coordinating federal programs to support locally-driven strategies for community transformation.

- In preparation for Habitat III, the U.S. National Committee will encourage dialogue across a range of policy priorities such as improving energy efficiency in buildings and transport, increasing capacity for participatory and urban and regional planning, incorporating infrastructure for the environmentally sound management of waste and wastewater, reducing air and other pollution, as well as deepening the engagement of citizens and communities in decisions that most affect them.[2]

- Habitat III is an opportunity to think and act with a collective voice **to create and sustain cities of opportunity**. More specifically, Habitat III is an opportunity for the U.S. to leverage the collective expertise of the domestic stakeholder network to address sustainable development globally and develop shared priorities domestically.[4]

Endnotes:

[1]Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN Habitat, Keynote Address, Commonwealth Local Government Conference, Kampala, Uganda, May 14-17, 2013

[2]Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, United Nations Foundation, U.S. Statement at Habitat III Prep Com I, New York, New York, September 17, 2014

[3]Secretary Julián Castro, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, First Meeting of the U.S. National Committee for Habitat III, Washington, DC, December 9, 2014

[4]Lynn Ross, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *PD&R Edge*, 2015.

[5]Creating Pathways to Opportunity Report published on whitehouse.gov, October 2011.