



**CUENCA DECLARATION  
FOR HABITAT III  
“INTERMEDIATE CITIES:  
URBAN GROWTH AND RENEWAL”**

CUENCA  
9-11 NOVEMBER 2015



United Nations

Host Partner





## **HABITAT III THEMATIC MEETING ON “INTERMEDIATE CITIES: URBAN GROWTH AND RENEWAL”**

**9-11 November 2015, Cuenca (Ecuador)**

### **THE CUENCA DECLARATION FOR HABITAT III**

#### **PROMOTING NETWORKS OF INTERMEDIATE CITIES TO ACHIEVE A SUSTAINABLE URBAN AND TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT**

We the participants to the Habitat III Thematic Meeting on “Intermediate cities: Urban Growth and Renewal”, hosted by the Municipality of Cuenca – Ecuador, from 9 to 11 November 2015, representing a wide range of stakeholders groups including, Civil Society, National Governments, Local and Regional Authorities, Intergovernmental Organizations, United Nations system, Academy, Research and Professionals, Private Sector, Farmers, Foundations, Philanthropies, Women, Youth and Children;

Gathered to discuss the relevance of Intermediate Cities in the overall configuration of territorial systems and their contribution to sustainable development ahead of the formulation of a new urban agenda at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016;

We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Municipality of Cuenca for the excellent organization of the conference and our gratitude to the residents for the warm hospitality accorded to all participants;

Reaffirming the need and the responsibility to achieve sustainable urbanization to promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies;

We welcome the decision of the 70th United Nations General Assembly to adopt the document “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, in particular, Goal 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”;

Noting that climate change impacts are unfolding rapidly, thereby undermining the livelihoods of people in cities and human settlements, threatening poverty eradication efforts and putting at risk the achievements of the SDGs, we emphasize the need for ambitious action towards a sustainable urbanization in order to mitigate and adapt to the effects of the climate change. To that end, we are hopeful that a new agreement on climate change will be reached at the next United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties 21 (UNFCCC COP21), to be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015;

Recognizing the potential contribution to sustainable development of all sections of the society, including persons and groups in vulnerable situations, as well as their specific needs;

Recognizing the need of a holistic and inclusive approach to sustainable urban development that guarantees the full exercise of citizenship and the realization of all human rights, including the right to development;



Bearing in mind that the concept of Intermediate Cities stems from their role as intermediaries within a territorial system, interacting with bigger cities, towns and other human settlements and more effectively articulating urban-rural linkages;

Mindful of the differences of population size considered to define Intermediate Cities, which may vary in different regions, ranging from 20,000/50,000 inhabitants to 500,000 and up to 1 Million in specific countries and regional contexts;

Appreciating that, whereas the world is now predominantly urban, today more than half of the urban population lives in small and Intermediate Cities;

Recognizing that, Intermediate Cities, for their size offer opportunities for more effective governance and management and they may facilitate improved social cohesion and sense of identity and belonging as well as a balanced relation with the surrounding natural environment;

Further recognizing that Intermediate Cities offer government administrative functions related to security, health, education, social services and culture closer to their population;

Recognizing also that Intermediate Cities offer services to rural areas and as such, often become “stopping points” for populations who could have migrated to larger cities and metropolis; and that these towns can be in a better position to offer decent jobs as well as land and housing at a fraction of what they would cost in a big city, and often with a higher quality of life;

Bearing in mind that compactness, density and connectivity, integrating the natural proximity factor of small and Intermediate Cities, potentially make intermediate cities more resilient, efficient and economically viable, as well as reducing environmental footprint and their contribution to the climate change;

Mindful of the role of Intermediate Cities in promoting a balanced regional sustainable development, through the integration of urban and rural functions into the regional and national spatial system, strengthening the linkages within the territory, alleviating poverty, providing a market for agricultural produce and extend basic services to the rural areas;

Cognizant of the current high pressure many Intermediate Cities are experiencing towards rapid growth, and the related difficulties to manage urban development and meet new demands for housing, land, infrastructure and basic services; beside the associated risk to lose their comparative advantages in terms of economic viability, social cohesion and quality of life, as well as their environmental sustainability;

Noting that small and intermediate cities have often limited capacity to effectively anticipate and finance planned extension and enforce measures to control unplanned development and avoid informal settlements formation;

Noting with concern the current decline of density in favor of an escalating sprawl and unplanned peri-urbanization of the Intermediate Cities, which poses challenges to the management and sustainability of the



same, implying higher costs of infrastructure and maintenance, affecting the economy of agglomeration's advantage and the unnecessary loss of agricultural and other productive land as well as land with high environmental value;

We advocate for the development of a more balanced system of cities and human settlements through inclusive national urban policies and strategy frameworks, as well as an effective regional and territorial planning, to ensure a better distributed urban growth;

We further advocate for the provision of appropriate legal, fiscal and organizational frameworks to promote a balanced and responsive urban development, strengthening social equity and gender equality as well as the full realization of human rights, in accordance with religious and cultural values of individual countries and their sovereignty;

We encourage strengthening the coordination between different levels of government, implementing the principle of subsidiarity, in planning and implementation processes of Intermediate Cities; this should include the development of multi-actor partnerships and inter-municipal cooperation mechanisms, overcoming challenges related to administrative boundaries' constraints, among others;

We recommend to promote civil society participation in decision making and planning processes, implementing and monitoring policies and defining indicators, strengthening capacity, with particular attention to youth and women as well as persons in vulnerable situations;

We recommend strengthening resilience in cities in order to reduce citizens' exposure and vulnerability to climate change and other economic, social and environmental shocks including natural and anthropogenic disasters;

We advocate for a global commitment to cooperate internationally on sustainable urban development that allows stakeholders in Intermediate Cities to access finance, technology and capacity-building, based on principles of equity, good governance, transparency, accountability and solidarity.

We advocate for the recognition of the importance of placing the right to the city for all, encompassing the notion of accessibility and affordability, at the center of urban development policies, combining citizen's participation with the right to education, health, housing, services and employment opportunities, recognizing diversity and promoting conviviality, identity and sense of belonging;

We recommend strengthening the processes of fiscal, political and administrative decentralization, with a clear distribution of tasks, responsibilities and resources, building the capacity of local governments to promote effective citizen participation and implement sustainable urban development policies;

We advocate for the adoption of culture as a key tool for promoting sustainable urban development, by preserving the urban, environmental and cultural identity of cities, fostering quality of life and the development of creative economy, thus contributing to poverty eradication and increasing social cohesion;



We encourage adequate investments in small and medium urban centers, including market centers, focusing on food security, capacity building, sustainable infrastructure and basic services provision, decent job creation and strengthening of social cohesion; We further encourage to promote the role of small and intermediate cities in strengthening food security systems through provision of sound infrastructure, access to land and effective trade links, to ensure that small scale farmers are linked to larger supply chains;

We recommend furthering of sustainable and integrated approaches to urban growth and regeneration, based on the assumption of a correlation between urbanization and development.

These approaches should consider ensuring:

- Adequate planning rules and regulations for the design, production and management of efficient and equitable human settlements;
- Qualitative and inclusive urban planning and design ;
- Efficient and transparent municipal finance systems to ensure effective investments and management, as well as equitable redistribution of benefits generated by the urban development;

We recommend the development of urban regeneration, renewal and informal settlement upgrading processes, that should not be implemented at the expense of vulnerable inhabitants of cities; These should be based on inclusive participatory planning, oriented to harnessing the cultural diversity and identity, as well as the urban heritage, both tangible and intangible, of the Intermediate Cities;

We further recommend anticipating and addressing rapid growth in Intermediate Cities through planned cities extensions and infill, including upgrading of informal settlements, with the aim of sustaining density, compactness and connectivity;

We encourage ensuring social and cultural mix as well as mix of uses in order to maintain the “good vibrancy” of the city and foster proximity factors, to enhance quality of life, social inclusion, reap the benefits of agglomeration economies, reduce energy demand as well as transit time and emissions, towards an improved health of the citizens as well as low emission and climate resilient development;

We recommend to further developing policies and interventions, including integrating mobility plans into overall urban plans, to decrease the demand for private vehicles in urban centers and discourage urban sprawl; these may include, ensuring political and financial commitment to develop sustainable trunk infrastructure and collective transport systems;

We urge supporting local governments of Intermediate Cities to identify, develop and sustainably exploit local assets and urban development opportunities for inclusive growth, job creation, the maintenance of existing livelihoods and increased tax revenue;



We further urge national and local governments, the private sector and the civil society, to collaborate to increase economic development in Intermediate Cities and surrounding regions, towards increasing jobs and micro-enterprises creation for an inclusive growth and increased tax revenue;

We recommend adequate housing policies that meet existing urban planning strategies and regulations as a key factor for the development of Intermediate Cities;

We recommend adequate provision of accessible, safe, inclusive and quality public space, to foster urban equity, social cohesion and better quality of life, with particular attention to women, children, elder persons and person with disabilities;

We advocate for appropriately embracing ICTs opportunities to foster civic engagement, data collection and analysis for city planning, enhancing transparent city management and more efficient service provision;

We recommend effective public regulation of the land market, to ensure equitable and sustainable provision of land suitable for urban development, avoiding speculations, gentrification as well as ensuring capturing and equitable distribution of the added value obtained as a result of public decisions;

We recommend that policies and programs designed to support the contribution of small and Intermediate Cities to sustainable urbanization be informed by evidence-based and multi-disciplinary research, regularly monitored and evaluated in a transparent way;

We advocate for the achievement of a truly inclusive New Urban Agenda, where no one is left behind with a holistic and people centered approach that informs, involves and engages the civil society, including persons with disabilities and their organizations, in all aspects of urban development;

We finally commit to promote the principles and the recommendations included in this Cuenca Declaration for Habitat III, ensuring that this effectively contributes to the formulation of the New Urban Agenda at the next United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to be held in Quito (Ecuador) in October 2016.

Cuenca (Republic of Ecuador), 11 November 2015