

U N E S C O

**Speech of Mr Wataru Iwamoto
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at the

Second UN-HABITAT/UNESCO/ISSC

Working Meeting

on

**“Links between Urban Policies
and the Right to the City”**

Barcelona Town Hall

27 and 28 March 2006

Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is IWAMOTO, I was transferred as Director for the Division of Social Sciences, Research and Policy on January 2006, and I rely on your assistance for this new and exciting work.

It is with a feeling of great satisfaction for UNESCO and myself that our meeting is taking place here, in Barcelona's Town Hall. This second meeting on "Links between urban policy and the right to the city" has been a joint undertaking, organized in conjunction with UN-HABITAT, the International Association of Educating Cities and UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector. Our combined efforts are a good example of the cooperation set out in the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed on 18 March 2005 by the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT and the Director-General of UNESCO.

Over the past 60 years, the human rights affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) have gradually become recognized, expanded, and incorporated into the ordinary lives of individuals and social groups, thus expressing the needs, questions and claims of our times. However, despite the profound socio-economic, political and territorial changes that have taken place in the past 60 years, we still need to build more respect for human rights – whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social. There are many in the international community who have argued that certain rights need further elaboration on the basis of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the right to develop, the right to safe drinking water, the right to a clean environment and also the "right to the city", which would basically consist of the right of all city dwellers to fully enjoy urban life with all the services and advantages the city has to offer, as well as taking an active part in city management.

A thorough understanding of the crucial role played by legal systems in the urbanization process is the basic condition for the promotion of extensive legal reform, which in turn is the condition for the promotion of urban reform leading to social inclusiveness and sustainable development.

Both UN-HABITAT and UNESCO are actively working towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, which state that the international community will spare no effort in strengthening “respect for all international human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development”. The Secretary-General’s Road Map for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals notes that a rights-based approach to development is important both for distributing development gains and ensuring equal participation in the development process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first of the eight Millennium Development Goals is the eradication of extreme poverty by 2015, and now, in 2006, we are in grave danger of lagging behind in our commitment to reduce poverty. In a rapidly urbanizing world, a rights-based approach means that all citizens should benefit from what cities have to offer in terms of access to income-generating opportunities, land and housing, water and sanitation, education and health care. Recognition of these rights in national policies and legislation is critical to bringing about a fundamental change in our approach to sustainable human development. A rights-based approach can help generate the political will and create a culture of resource allocation that places the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals on an equal footing with the interests of those who are better off.

Although there are encouraging initiatives being taken by key players in various cities and countries, we do not yet have a consolidated approach to an inclusive urban policy and governance. That is the reason why UN-HABITAT and UNESCO are jointly supporting international comparative research with a view to forging consensus among

all key actors, and local authorities in particular, on the constituent elements of public policy and legislation that combine urban development with social equity and justice.

The public debate launched by UN-HABITAT, UNESCO and ISSC on 18 March 2005 was the very first step in creating this consensus. So for a year now, UN-HABITAT has been working in cooperation with UNESCO to set up a working group on “Urban Policies and the Right to the City”. The working group includes representatives from the academic world, international NGOs of cities and city dwellers, representatives of municipalities and city professionals. The first meeting was held in September 2005: topics on the agenda were law and urban planning, inter-religious municipal councils, municipal charters for citizens’ rights and responsibilities, social and spatial integration of migrants in cities, women’s participation, the European initiative on human rights in cities, and the Brazilian “City Statute”.

The joint UN-HABITAT/UNESCO initiative will be further developed at the third session of the World Urban Forum to be held in Vancouver from 19 to 23 June 2006. The initiative to promote inclusive cities will be primarily addressed to Mayors, municipalities, city professionals and international NGOs that group together associations of cities and city dwellers. We hope to get the idea across with the aid of information kits, capacity-building training seminars and examples of best practices.

International research on this issue will be receiving support from a UNESCO Chair – Urban policies and citizenship – which is in the final stages of being established. Universities in Canada, Chile, Mexico, Morocco and Lebanon have chosen the Lyon Research Consortium to house the Chair which will receive funding from the City of Lyon, the City of St Étienne, the Rhone-Alpes region, and France’s public investment organization: *La Caisse des dépôts et consignations* to the amount of 110,500 euros per annum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity to make it quite clear that UNESCO has no intention of proposing a global normative instrument on “The Right to the City”. UNESCO would like to promote the international project identifying best practices in the field of law and urban planning; inter-religious municipal councils; citizens’ municipal charters on rights and responsibilities; the participation of women in urban management; the spatial and social integration of migrants in cities – all these areas are included in the UN-HABITAT campaign on urban governance, and both in UNESCO’s strategy on human rights and the Organization’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Impressed by the fact that The Secretary General of the United Cities and Local Governments Association, Mrs Elizabeth Gateau, launched officially our work and that a city like Barcelona hosted our second meeting, I wish to express the deep gratitude of UNESCO to Mr Joan Clos , Mayor of Barcelona, represented to day by Ms Pilar Figueras, Secretary General of the International Association of Educative Cities. This gratitude is extended to the Interreligious Barcelona Centre, represented here by Professor Francesc Rovira with a special mention to the excellent cooperation established with Mr Onno Seroo, Deputy Director of the UNESCO CENTER of Catalonia.

I hardly need to say how very much our UN-HABITAT/UNESCO team appreciates the contribution of the international experts who are with us today coming from Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Malaysia and Spain.

This second UN-HABITAT/UNESCO meeting has attracted the interest of many major international NGOs such as Metropolis, the United Cities and Local Governments Association (UCLG) and the Commonwealth Local Governments Forum. The representation of such important bodies at this meeting today, is certainly indicative of the interest major cities are now taking in United Nations research on all aspects of urbanization, particularly with regard to the social segregation that exists in so many of our cities, the fragmentation of urban space and capacity-building to enable local authorities to cope with the new challenges posed by the urbanization phenomenon.

Finally, I should like to add how much we value the cooperation of our colleagues from UN-HABITAT, Paul Taylor, and Director of the UN-HABITAT Office in Brussels, and Shipra Narang, Project Officer for Urban Governance in the Nairobi Headquarters. Excellent working relations have been established between our two Organizations on this joint initiative that we hope to have the opportunity of developing further at the third session of the World Urban Forum in Vancouver next June.

Allow me to express my very best wishes for the success of this meeting; I shall look forward to hearing about the outcome of your deliberations.

I now give the floor to my colleagues from UN-HABITAT and UNESCO.

Thank you for your attention.

Wataru IWAMOTO