

Housing

A yurt at the Palais des Nations to celebrate World Habitat Day



A traditional yurt, provided by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, was installed in the gardens of the Palais des Nations on 1 October to mark World Habitat Day and other UNECE events and meetings to discuss sustainable housing.

The yurt, a traditional home for many people in Central Asia, was chosen as it represents the quintessential sustainable house: energy efficient, made of recyclable and green materials, and with a close to zero ecological footprint.

Celebrations on World Habitat Day involved Geneva-based Ambassadors and UN high-level officials presenting and discussing examples of sustainable housing practices throughout the region. The gathering was accompanied by a video exhibit, entitled "Building the Future We Want", displaying photos of sustainable buildings and green design from countries in the UNECE region. The exhibit was also linked with UNOG's Strategic Heritage Plan to green the Palais des Nations.

On opening, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Director General of UNOG, stressed the achievements of the Palais des Nations: "Over the past 10 years, we have put in place a number of measures to cut the consumption of water by 40 per cent, carbon emissions by 34 per cent and the use of electricity by 20 per cent. We aim to do even more through our Strategic Heritage Plan". Sven Alkalaj, UNECE Executive Secretary, noted that "Sustainable housing can be simple, affordable and adequate. Building sustainably is not necessarily defined by luxurious architecture, expensive investment and unaffordable technology, and is more accessible than often thought. However, to make sustainable housing accessible to everyone, there is a need for collective action by international organizations, national governments, political leaders and experts."

Projects presented included:

- The United Nations Palais des Nations, which incorporates sustainable features, such as: air conditioning insured from water from Lake Geneva, energy-efficient lighting, solar panels for the production of hot sanitary water as well as solar lamps;
- The plus-energy Aspern IQ Technology Centre in Vienna, which produces more energy that it consumes;
- The Green Lighthouse in Copenhagen, which is the first carbon-neutral public building in Denmark;
- The High Line in New York City, a unique public park using green roof technologies which resulted from the concerted action of citizens to rehabilitate a urban neighbourhood;
- The new symbol of Astana- Khan Shatyr Shopping and Entertainment Centre, resistant to both cold winters and hot summers through the use of energy-efficient technology, ensuring comfort under one vast tensile structure;
- The recently built energy-efficient school in the city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, from which energy savings are estimated to be around 40 % ;
- The Pilke House in Rovaniemi, Finland, with its ecological wood construction.

The video exhibit, in addition to the examples above, featured sustainable design from 19 other countries, including hospitals, schools, research centres, housing and residential buildings. Some of the projects presented included:

- The American Heart Institute in Nicosia, Cyprus, which received the EU's Green Building Award 2011, for its role as a high performing, energy saving building;
- The "Efficiency House Plus with Electric Mobility" in Berlin, which is more than just a single-family home; it is a micro power plant, resource depot, research project, platform for dialogue and, last but not least, a contribution to improving the quality of the built environment;
- The Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research Administration in Negev Desert Highlands, Israel, which integrates a number of climatic response strategies, including internal thermal mass for heat storage and external thermal insulation to minimize heat loss;
- The National Laboratory for Energy and Geology- Solar Building XXI in Lisbon, Portugal, is a building with low energy consumption, integrating solar and thermal renewable technologies and passive systems for heating and cooling.

The exhibition is a result of communication work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, which has been working on assisting member States towards improving the sustainability of their housing sectors in the course of the last 65 years through the provision of policy guidance, advisory services and capacity building activities. □



UNECE recognized by ministers of Central Asian countries as a leading agency in the area of water resources management

The Conference "20 Years of Water Cooperation in Central Asia: Past Experiences and Future Challenges" was organized on 20 and 21 September in Almaty by the Ministries or Committees of Water Resources of the five member countries of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its establishment. ICWC is responsible for the rational and efficient use of water resources in the Aral Sea Basin. In 1993 it was included in the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea which has a broader mandate for achieving environmental sustainability in the Aral Sea Basin.

The Conference was attended by present and former ministers or heads of committees of water resources of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It reviewed regional cooperation in the management of water and energy resources during the last 20 years and discussed future challenges, in particular climate change and its effects on water flows. Statements by present and former top level Central Asian decision makers covered key aspects of water resources management and analysed past successes and shortcomings. While several multilateral and bilateral donors and regional organizations participated in the Conference, UNECE was the only one invited to make a plenary statement - a clear recognition of its contribution to the rational and efficient management of water resources in Central Asia.

UNECE's statement summarized its broad involvement in the area of water resources management in Central Asia, notably as the custodian of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. The statement also mentioned several large projects which UNECE is implementing in the region, including the multi-year Program "Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia", projects on dam safety, assistance to Kazakh-Kyrgyz cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers, to Afghan-Tajik cooperation on the upper Amu Darya and support to National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management as part of the EU Water Initiative. □

Regional Centre of Excellence will advance Public-Private Partnerships in South-East Europe

The International Conference on Promoting Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Montenegro and South-East Europe unanimously agreed to establish a Regional Centre of Excellence for South-East Europe under the auspices of the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence to disseminate best practices in PPPs and to assist countries in the region with their implementation.

This International Conference was held in Podgorica, Montenegro from 18 to 19 September 2012, and was organized by UNECE together with the Commission for Concessions in Montenegro, and the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro.

The conference was attended by over 100 participants from the private and public sectors, including representatives from PPP units in South-East Europe and a representative from the Regional Cooperation Council. The conference was opened by the Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro, Vujica Lazovic, and keynote speeches were delivered by ministers and mayors from local towns.

At the opening session, the Conference agreed to establish a task force to explore a proposal to set up the Regional Centre under the auspices of the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence. The task force, composed of representatives from the region and led by Kamilo Vrana from the Croatian PPP Agency and vice-Chairman of UNECE's Team of Specialists on PPP, discussed extensively the priority tasks and modalities of its work and operations in the region.

Speaking on this proposal, Kamilo Vrana stated: "There are countries in the region which are eager to implement PPPs but, because of the size of their markets, lack the capability to promote such projects. This regional centre, therefore, will help these countries and our region as a whole, create economies of scale and drive the PPP process forward."

At the end of the Conference, the proposal by the task force was adopted based on the vision of combining the global experience in PPPs with local needs, practical issues and concrete goals, thereby generating a new momentum for the PPP market in South-East Europe.

This was the first time that Montenegro organized a conference exclusively on the subject of PPPs and with an international focus. The participants of the conference fully appreciated the opportunity to exchange best practices and experiences with international experts drawn from a number of European countries and the United States. □

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Public-Private Partnerships

