I. Draft Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development

to be adopted by the Ministers and the Heads of ECE national delegations participating in the seventy-eighth session of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the Committee.

(Geneva, 9 November 2017)

A. *Preamble*

1. We, the Ministers and the Heads of delegations from the member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), met to discuss the challenges and opportunities of the sustainability housing in liveable cities and sustainable human settlements, and to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Committee.

2. We appreciate the historical importance of the Committee as a cornerstone of the pan-European cooperation in the field of housing and urban development, including its transforming efforts to address housing and urban development challenges in countries with economies in transition. The Committee is the only open pan-European intergovernmental platform to deal with these topics from all the relevant views – economic, social and environmental. The work of the Committee is aimed mainly at assisting member States in the region to address a number of major housing and urban challenges, including those with an international nature, such as energy efficiency measures in the residential sector, or preventing social exclusion due to unaffordable housing for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people, etc. All aspects are discussed and exchange of practical steps and guidelines and methodologies are produced to support member States deeply and in a result-oriented way.

3. We reiterate the importance for governments at all levels and relevant stakeholders to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy, the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, and the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region for the Period 2014-2020. We welcome the adoption of the New Urban Agenda by the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development - Habitat III.

4. We underline the need to promote coherence and cross-sectoral links in implementing the above-mentioned global and regional accords. We recognise the role of UN-Habitat and the United Nations Regional Commissions in the regional level implementation, follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

5. We recognize the importance of cooperating with all relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, United Nations system, other international, including regional and subregional, organizations, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, women and youth.

B. *We are aware of the following trends:*

6. Across the region, the shift to a post-industrial, knowledge economy, and the increasingly important role of services, are changing the structure and character of the

economy, introducing demands for enhanced qualifications from the labour market and placing different spatial demands on the cities. The knowledge economy and the digital revolution flourish around centres of scientific and educational excellence, and are placing new demands on the physical structure of the cities, including challenges in access to affordable housing.

7.   Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a growing role in the development of smart, sustainable cities, including initiatives aimed at sustaining and improving quality of life in urban areas, though this growth presents its own unique set of challenges, such as privacy, security, defence of public interests, etc.

8.   Lack of affordability of housing is a critical matter, leading to problems of accessibility to adequate housing and social exclusion. Social and spatial inequality within and among the cities in the region has been growing, making some high quality urban areas and housing affordable only to the most affluent. Homelessness and housing exclusion have been increasing. In many countries, furthermore, the recent wave of migration are exacerbating the complexity of the growing inequalities.

9.   There is widespread consensus for intergovernmental action on the environment and climate change. In the cities of the ECE region, this will mean an accelerated trend to further decreasing pollution and more rapidly de-carbonizing urban development and life, requiring adequate environmental regulations and high volumes of public and private investment, while respecting other sustainable development pillars.

10.   International standards in housing and sustainable development are driving action towards resilient, connected, spatially - and socially- integrated and compact cities in an equitable partnership with rural areas. There is a trend towards people-centred and integrated planning.

11.   These aims and processes will continue to require collaboration, consensus and positive action among national and city governments and all relevant stakeholders. Addressing these evermore complex social, economic and environmental challenges will require new paradigms and a redoubling of efforts from the governance systems to achieve access to decent housing for all and sustainable urbanization.

C. We invite national governments, local and regional authorities and all other relevant stakeholders to work together to address the housing and urban challenges, in particular by

(a) Economic dimension

12.   Promoting innovative and productive cities to increase cities' attractiveness with a focus on innovation, inclusiveness, improvement of youth perspectives, and job creation through entrepreneurial-friendly environments.

13. Promoting access to decent and affordable housing for all. Reducing the economic polarisation in growing cities that is the result of the housing market imbalances by (a) promoting tenure balanced housing policies and by supporting all tenures; (b) addressing housing cost induced poverty and household ineptness arising from high housing costs; (c) promoting housing supply, making cities more attractive for people and addressing housing abandonment in shrinking cities and areas.

14.   Promoting the improvement of access to basic services allowing sustainable growth and job creation. The empowerment of women and better gender equality are priorities of the urban development policy.

(b) *Social dimension*

15. Strengthening the use of housing and spatial planning and urban design, taking into account the needs of the disabled, the elderly and other vulnerable groups, and ensuring participation in planning by all key stakeholders and the inhabitants, as planning cities is an important part of civilization.

16. Promoting inclusive cities by addressing the multiple aspects of housing, urban poverty and exclusion, especially ensuring the access to adequate housing for all.

17. Developing and implementing capacity-building programmes for participatory, integrated, sustainable, resilient and affordable human settlement planning while enabling the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

(c) *Environmental dimension*

18. Promoting green, compact and resilient cities by increasing urban resource efficiency (decreasing the consumption of energy, water and land, reducing waste), the circular economy, sustainable urban mobility solutions, and enhancing green infrastructure and nature-based solutions.

19. Promoting standards of housing provision and renovation to increase energy efficiency, and supporting measures for adaptation and mitigation to climate change, to ensure accessible and healthy housing supply for all.

(d) *Principles of governance*

20. Promoting national housing and urban policies conducive to sustainable urbanization, and their translation to locally adequate housing and urban legislation and regulations; promoting the strategic planning of human settlements; and enacting measures at national and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each scale of governance, thereby guaranteeing the most effective results.

21. Stressing that approaches will be locality-specific and, to be effective, be as varied as the diversity of the countries, economies, societies and cultures in the region.

22. Promoting smart and sustainable cities and an integrated and holistic approach to planning and managing cities. Promoting the use of ICTs in cities in a way that is mindful of both the opportunities, including increased efficiencies, as well as challenges, such as privacy, security, defence of public interest, etc.

23. Promoting good urban governance by supporting and building capacity at the local level of local authorities and other stakeholders such as homeowner and tenant associations and housing cooperatives, a key element for the sustainable development of urban areas.

24. Promoting secure tenure and the availability of housing options, including the neutral treatment of tenures, in order to encourage the development of adequate supplies of affordable housing.

25. Focusing on capacity-building and institutional support, especially for countries with economies in transition, to promote policy implementation.

26. Introducing effective financial systems at the national and municipal levels, enabling local governments of cities to better plan and implement the programmes elaborated and support the equitable and sustainable development of housing and human settlements.

27. Elaborating country-specific policy guidance and recommendations on challenges related to housing, urban development and land management in the ECE region.

28. Developing in-depth assessments and flagship reports, including a series of Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management.

29. Participating in the relevant global and regional processes to harmonize methodologies, definitions and approaches to data collection in the area of housing, urban development and land management and administration at all levels; supporting development of common terms, language definitions and standards.

30. Promoting dialogue between governments and relevant stakeholders using existing platforms, to facilitate the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices.

31. Creating regional networks of governments, experts and stakeholders; organizing workshops, study trips and other capacity building activities to promote implementation.

32. Creating synergies using existing platforms and involving relevant programmes, agencies, bodies and other stakeholders, to ensure consistency and complementarity, and allowing effective collaboration on housing, urban planning and land-related issues.

32. Regularly monitoring and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, the UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy, the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region for the period 2014-2020 and the UNECE/ITU Smart Sustainable City Indicators; and, for that purpose, strengthening the capacity of national authorities, including their statistical services, and improving mechanisms for information exchange and using monitoring tools that ensure a coherent methodology across the region and global comparability.

D. *We confirm our commitment to promote the implementation of the above-mentioned agreements and principles through synergies and cross-sectoral actions. We commit to foster national and global implementation of the economic, social and environmental actions mentioned above.*

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Annex I: Background paper to the Draft Geneva Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development

1.   The ECE region is home to 1.3 billion people, some 17% of the total global population. It contains at least 263 cities of 500,000 or more inhabitants, and contributes to more than 40% of the world's GDP. The large proportion of its population living in cities is still growing, albeit slowly, but in some cities in the region it is decreasing.

2.   The countries are very diverse in almost all features: size, geography, economy and culture. The region corresponds mostly to what is referred to as 'the Global North'.[1]

3.   It is characterized by the following trends and patterns:

(a)   Urbanization and demography

4.   Within the urban population, in part of the region there is a trend towards urban concentration and agglomeration into super-cities, such as those in the metropolitan regions from Boston to Washington, D.C., or London through the Randstad and the Ruhrgebiet to the cities of Northern Italy.

5.   There is a countervailing trend towards shrinking cities within less successful and more remote regions where the population is declining. This often goes along with ageing, as the young and/or highly qualified leave. This problem is almost exclusive to the ECE region.

6.   Using approaches to planning and managing city development that place quality of life at the core of decision-making and integrate economic, social, environmental and cultural considerations into urban plans, policies and projects is, therefore, a key to avoiding risks, protecting vulnerable groups and enhancing all benefits for the urban populations.

7.   There is a general tendency towards urban sprawl, not only in cities experiencing population growth. This poses problems for environmental and economic sustainability. These problems are likely to be exacerbated by the consequences of the ageing of the population.

8.   A rapidly-ageing population is most prominent in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Ageing combined with population decline pose serious challenges for cities, particularly in regards to diminishing local tax revenues, the provision of services, access to transportation and housing, and the accessibility of public space. Conversely, Central Asian countries in the region are experiencing growth in the young population, posing difficulties regarding housing and job provision.

9.   Migration is a key issue throughout the region. Its magnitude and significance has increased in the past 20 years. It has led to increased diversity in some cities, but also brings challenges for social cohesion. Migrants settle mainly in large cities and this can lead to urban polarization putting pressure on the local housing systems.

(b)   The Economy of Cities

10.   A substantial part of the region has undergone economic transition in recent decades, from centrally-planned economies to market ones. In general, large and capital cities have prospered, while smaller ones and rural areas have coped less well, economically, socially, physically, environmentally and culturally. The economic restructuring posed huge challenges

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[1] This background document is based on the analyses, conclusions and recommendations of the Habitat III Regional Report for the UNECE Region, http://www.unece.org/housing/habitat3regionalreport.html

for some industrial cities, company towns in particular, in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

11.   The manufacturing industry has declined in the region. However, it remains important. There is a shift to cleaner, greener manufacturing with smaller spatial demands. The rise of the knowledge economy in the region, built on a digital revolution, is bringing both opportunities and challenges for cities and the hinterlands. These changes demand different forms of space that better suit new conditions of economic production, social requirements and cultural institutions. While globalization remains significant, the local qualities of cities become ever more important. The urban rural links are important for the sustainable and balanced territorial development.

12.   The digital revolution brings both challenges and opportunities for governments in the region. Technical innovation and ICTs offer new opportunities for urban planning, urban life, and creation of new jobs; through shared and service based economies, application of big data and internet platforms for urban management. The digital revolution also further promotes interaction of governments and service providers with the public, public participation in decision-making, awareness-raising, transparency of urban management and advancement of tenure security through effective land administration. However, the need to ensure data privacy, data security and data ownership are challenging the capacity of governments to utilize these technical innovations in defence of the public interest.

13.   Sustainable development requires the advancement of tenure security through clearly defining and firmly protecting property rights by legal systems and through effective land administration.

(c)   Living in cities

14.   The global financial crisis that started in 2008 has led to more inequalities in the region, lowering the income of a substantive part of the population, and negatively affecting many aspects of people's lives, in regards to housing affordability and accessibility of urban services among others.

15.   Social interactions in cities have changed over the past 20 years. There has been, on the one hand, a tendency to develop closed communities and shopping malls and, on the other, a reaffirmation of the central role of public spaces as frameworks for innovation and social interaction.

16.   Many of the factors that support equity in a city also support the well-being of all its inhabitants. These include access to housing, transportation, energy and water supplies, public services, public participation in decision-making, the availability of, and access to, safe and healthful food, green spaces, and the reduction of emissions. There is a growing recognition of the relevance of healthy urban settings and buildings in countries throughout the region.

(d)   Housing

17.   Lack of affordability of housing is a critical matter, leading to problems of accessibility to adequate housing, social exclusion, and increased spatial stratification in cities. Despite being less acute than in other regions, homelessness and informal settlements remain a problem in the ECE region. The housing sector needs to address these problems while meeting new aspirations, such as energy efficiency and customer-adjusted design, along with the provision of additional services (e.g. for the elderly, the homeless and migrant people).

18.   The past two decades have witnessed a general trend towards increasing home ownership and reinforcing housing markets in the region. The total stock of, and investment in, social and public housing is decreasing. Social housing stock in advanced economies has been reduced, while the former public housing in countries with economies in transition has

been rapidly privatized, leaving little time for local governments and individuals (especially owners) to adapt.

19.   In the eastern part of the region, the phenomenon of 'poor owners' has become endemic, as a result of the privatization of public housing, a lack of maintenance, and energy inefficiency. Delays caused by collective decision-making by owners of large housing estates, whether in 'affluent' or 'poor' areas, have increased costs and often resulted in the deterioration of apartment blocks, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

(d)   Environment and disaster risks

20.   The region is among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases (GHGs) per capita, and atmospheric pollutants remain high. Action taken to reduce environmental pollution will also help to secure public health and well-being.

21.   Cities both play an important role as a source and target area of environmental degradation, with strong impacts on their inhabitants. Air pollution, flooding, droughts, earthquakes, landslides and heat-waves are the most prevalent environmental issues of the region, with cities being the most vulnerable. Disaster risk reduction is an issue more pressing in parts of the region, with an increased threat/risk of natural disaster exacerbated by climate change. This has a negative impact on quality of life, mainly in urban areas, and can even endanger lives.

22.   Urban sprawl has increased and resulted in the growing use of land, urbanisation pressure on green spaces and fragmentation of forested areas and agricultural farms. The extension of road networks and increasing traffic congestion have further affected the availability of land for other uses and contributed to the deterioration of air quality. There is a need to limit the negative impact of housing on the environment, and enhance the energy efficiency of the housing sector. Numerous programmes have taken initiatives to improve urban environmental conditions and the impact of cities on the global climate.

(e)   Governance

23.   There has been an increase in the importance of the role of local governments, with a corresponding growth in that of city networks, electronic access to information, and public participation.

24.   The region exhibits a wide variety of different governance models. However, urban governance has experienced decentralization. These differences reflect both the local context and history. Successful governance modes and institutional structures often cannot be simply transplanted from one part of the region to another: context is crucial.

25.   Many challenges for urban governance remain, such as the effectiveness in limiting urban sprawl (especially in case of informal settlements), the creation or reinforcement of socially-cohesive and culturally diverse neighbourhoods, the secure management of urban technology, the management of urban functional areas that extend over several administrative jurisdictions, the resistance to change of highly fragmented institutional frameworks, the harmonization of norms, and the role of participatory frameworks and platforms for inhabitants' involvement in urban governance.

26.   The private sector plays an important role in the development and transformation of urban areas. In general, the role of the public sector has been changing, resulting in more opportunities and responsibilities for the private sector.

27.   The growing use of e-Government, e-Governance, e-Participation and e-Inclusion at city level has been driven by the supply of new ICT services. Local authorities' capacity to maximize the benefits of the digital revolution without undermining their democratic mandate,

is a challenge that remains to be addressed. The progress of e-Governance is variable and, in some countries, there is room for further development.

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