

1st Habitat Summit - A Platform for Developing Liveable Cities in India

"A citizen led initiative towards building alternative urban futures for India"

New Delhi, Delhi, August 25, 2009 /[India PRwire](#)/ -- The India Habitat Centre, in association with Mirabilis Advisory and Urban Habitats Forum (a professional civil society initiative to advocate for more liveable cities in India) is hosting the 1st Habitat Summit (www.habitatsummit.org) from 24-26 September 2009 at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Perhaps the first ever exercise of its kind, and likely to be the biggest urban event of the year, the **1st Habitat Summit** will bring together a **multi-disciplinary group of thinkers** to discuss solutions to critical issues facing the future urbanisation of India, as well as to highlight unique development opportunities. **The Summit aims to drive public engagement towards the creation of an alternative urban vision and agenda that considers liveability, sustainability and competitiveness as key parameters for success in the development of India's current and future cities.**

Introducing the Summit, **Kiran Karnik, President India Habitat Centre** said: *"I am pleased that the India Habitat Centre, in association with Mirabilis Advisory and Urban Habitats Forum, is hosting the 1st Habitat Summit, to take the lead in addressing the issue of sustainable urbanisation in India. We need more liveable cities in India, and the journey must begin by uplifting the quality of dialogue on urban issues – the Summit will help accomplish this by convening stakeholders from across society to join the conversation and provide alternative solutions for a better urban future."*

India Habitat Centre, in partnership with Urban Habitats Forum, initiated a renewed dialogue on India's future cities 18 months ago; the Summit is an escalation of this dialogue to a larger platform. The Summit will feature numerous public facing activities, including an **Urban Expo, a Green Jobs Fair, an Ideas Competition, and Public events** besides hosting a closed door conference that will debate key policy issues related to urban India. The Summit also aims to engage India's future leaders through the **Forum Fellows Programme** – a scholarship programme targeted at young students and professionals between 18-35 – to ensure the dialogue has the participation of the people who will drive the future urban agenda.

Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, also commended the 1st Habitat Summit and its objectives: *"As India's capital, I believe that Delhi must set the example for the country by transforming into a liveable, sustainable and competitive city. The 2010 Commonwealth Games provide the right impetus to achieving this target. With its focus on creating lasting urban legacies and showcasing live urban regeneration projects an initiative like the 1st Habitat Summit is a step in the right direction."*

ENGAGING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

The uniqueness of the 1st Habitat Summit lies in the way that it will facilitate exchange and productive dialogue among all key stakeholders in society by bringing together a diverse set of leaders, including national and international expert urban thinkers, policymakers, public administrators, corporate leaders, heads of non-governmental and civil society organisations, and young professionals.

Strategic guidance and direction for the dialogue at the 1st Habitat Summit is being provided by a **Group of Mentors**. These include **Arun Maira, Member - Planning Commission, Government of India**, who acknowledged that there is an urgent need to prepare India's cities for the huge demographic shift in the coming years: *"The proportion of India's population living in cities from move from 27% to over 50% adding over 300 million people to urban areas. Several difficult issues will have to be addressed, and innovative thinking will be required to manage our cities. Initiatives such as the 1st Habitat Summit must be effectively used to drive collaboration, as well as cohesion in dialogue towards a shared understanding and vision for the future."*

Other Mentors of the Habitat Summit include K C Sivaramakrishnan, Chairman, Centre for Policy Research; Madhukar Gupta, Former Union Home Secretary & Vice Chairman, DDA, Government of India; Meera Sanyal, Executive Vice President & Country Head, ABN Amro India; Kiran Karnik, Honorary President, India Habitat Centre; Arbind Singh, Co-ordinator, National Association of Street Vendors of India; and Ravi Singh, CEO & Secretary General, World Wide Fund for Nature, India.

According to **Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, World Wide Fund For Nature, India:** *“Cities in India need to adopt new urban planning paradigms to design more environment-friendly spaces. Our natural resources are limited, much of which will be used for the building of our new cities and centres of economy around them. The use of such resources should must be sustainable and forward urban planning be integrated in harmony with nature. The 1st Habitat Summit aims to highlight ways in which India’s future cities can be made sustainable, and qualitative.”*

OPENING SPACES AND INVITING IDEAS

The 'Summit' will consist of a **three-day conference, that is supported by Europe’s leading design consultancy BDP and The Sustainable Planet Institute, a new think tank focussing on environmental and urbanisations issues.** *Sanjeev Sanyal, Founder Sustainable Planet Institute, stated: "We need to prepare for an urban India. The Sustainable Planet Institute strongly believes that urbanization, if wisely managed, is a solution rather than a problem. We hope that the inaugural Habitat Summit will create the framework for an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable India."*

In addition, the **Urban Expo titled “Possibilities, is supported by leading design and architecture practices Morphogenesis, Anagram and KCA.** The Expo will feature accessible displays and installations that project the possibilities our cities have for radical improvement through innovative thinking and via the deployment of “organic interventions”.

Promoted by **The Climate Project-India and the Sierra Club,** the **Green Jobs Fair** will connect employers with green jobs and job seekers with green values. **Gaurav Gupta, Director, The Climate Project-India,** explained the thinking behind the Green Jobs Fair: *“It is clear that economies around the world have to transition towards more sustainable processes. Managing our natural resources and correctly pricing for the effects of pollution will mean dramatic shifts in what and how we consume. This required transition represents an unparalleled opportunity for the creation of sustainable new jobs and changes to existing jobs.”* He pointed out that “green economy” will dwarf the much vaunted IT revolution. *“India will be the Third Largest Market in Low-Carbon and Green Goods & Services, with a 6% share of the \$5 trillion global market. According to an HSBC report this means that green technologies and industries in India will attract spending in the region of \$150 billion (Rs 7.6 trillion) between 2008 and 2017. The urban economy of tomorrow will be profoundly affected by this shift. But do we have the skilled workforce to make the most of this opportunity? As part of the Habitats Forum, we are hosting a large scale public Green Jobs Fair to raise awareness on the fantastic career opportunities in the sustainability space”.*

“Delhi Within”, an **Ideas Competition** organised by Champion Cities, Anagram Architects and India Habitat Centre, is part of the effort to encourage a multi-disciplinary engagement with the city and urban issues and to facilitate positive change in India's cities undergoing rapid transformations in their built environment. It intends to showcase ideas borne out of multi-disciplinary research and creative practices that reveal and work with the forces that create define, evolve and mutate urban environments and experiences.

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE URBAN AGENDA

Talking about the importance of ensuring that India’s urbanisation agenda is an inclusive one, **Arbind Singh, Founder, Nidan & Co-ordinator, National Association of Street Vendors of India** said: *“Cities in India can be very unequal spaces that marginalize a large number of their citizens. To be truly sustainable, cities must be inclusive. This inclusiveness can take many forms – shared public spaces, livelihoods for urban poor, affordable housing, accessible and adequate public transport. It is heartening to see that the 1st Habitat Summit will address the issue of inclusion and contestations among citizens.”*

Issues that will be deliberated at the Summit include the urban economy, education, land use, sustainability, transportation, urban governance, affordable housing, and urban planning. Commenting on the Summit’s agenda, **Rakesh Mehta, Chief Secretary, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi,** said: *“India needs to create cities that offer a wide range of choices for urban mobility. As the country’s capital, Delhi has taken a lead in achieving this by creating a well networked and integrated public transport system. With initiatives such as the BRTS and Delhi Metro already successfully underway, the next step is to make the city “walkable”. I am pleased*

to see that the issue of "Walkability" will be a central part of the agenda at the 1st Habitat Summit. "

The 1st Habitat Summit is the beginning of a wider national platform, as the Urban Habitats Forum rolls out the model of the Summit to States across India, thus sustaining a truly national dialogue about how best to move forward with the needs of urbanisation. By bringing together all major stakeholders in society, the model of the Habitat Summit can facilitate urban change at a time when it is of ever-increasing importance.

Notes to Editor

The India Habitat Centre was conceived to provide a physical environment which would serve as a catalyst for a synergetic relationship between individuals and institutions working in diverse habitat related areas and therefore, maximise their total effectiveness. (www.indiahabitat.org)

Mirabilis Advisory is an international economic development consultancy that works in the area of globalization, sustainability and entrepreneurship.

Urban Habitats Forum is a public awareness platform established by Mirabilis Advisory in partnership with India Habitat Centre, and designed as a collaborative network of multidisciplinary thinkers and change-makers to push for innovation in shaping the next generation of cities in India. The forum aims to mobilise action through intelligent discourse, impactful research and result-driven advocacy.

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