

Remarks at the
Launch of Dr. Peter Oberlander's report
At the
World Urban Forum, III

June 20, 2006
From 12.15 to 13.00
UN Plaza, Exposition Hall
Vancouver

Maureen O'Neil
President, International Development Research Centre

Thank you, Dr. Oberlander.

Dr. Tibiajuka, Dr. Oberlander, Ms. Paxton-Mann, Ms. Knight, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen:

IDRC is pleased to have supported the research that went into producing *Towards Sustainable Urbanization: Canada/UN Habitat Initiatives 1976-2000*. As most of you know, Vancouver played host to the first UN Conference on Human Settlements in 1976. I find it fitting that, 30 years later, in the same city, we have taken the time to review Canada's contribution to the UN agenda on human settlements, as well as the UN agenda's influence on Canada's approach to its own cities. I commend the University of British Columbia team, led by Professor Peter Oberlander, for their thoroughness and thoughtfulness in researching and compiling this report in a little less than a year. I would also like to thank the many experts in Canada and abroad who commented on and contributed to this milestone document.

As you read the report, you will note that IDRC has played a significant role in Canada's dialogue with the UN system on addressing the challenges of urbanization. Two years after its founding in 1970, the Centre's first president, David Hopper, launched the Urban-Rural Dynamics Project to explore urbanization processes. The Centre's emphasis on multidisciplinary research in the 1970s mirrored UN efforts to combine the built and natural environments in program development. Its Urban and Regional Development program funded research on issues, which grew in importance on the UN agenda. During the UN's International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987, IDRC encouraged, among others, the Habitat International NGO Coalition to research housing problems and solutions in developing countries and to share good practices with others.

In 1993, IDRC intensified its collaboration with several UN Habitat programs supporting joint research for policy change on urban agriculture and environmental risk management, two areas of work IDRC is featuring at this Forum. IDRC has also become more involved in World Urban Forum proceedings since their launch in 2000. We were

part of the official Canadian delegation to the 2004 forum in Barcelona. Here in Vancouver, many of our partners from all over the world are here to stage six networking events and to participate actively in roundtables and other WUF activities. As a representative of the people of Canada in the world, IDRC has nurtured a relationship with the UN that, I believe, has proven fruitful to us both.

It is our sincere hope that *Towards Sustainable Urbanization* will provide a welcome continuity and linkage between this Forum and the next, to be held in Nanjing, China, in 2008. Urban development challenges are an important research priority for IDRC. In the past year, we have expanded our urban programming with the launch of our Urban Environment and Poverty program. I find their Focus Cities Research Initiative particularly exciting. Focus Cities can be thought of as urban laboratories for testing solutions and refining actions. The idea is to reduce the ecological footprint of our cities while providing viable livelihood options to its most vulnerable groups.

A little later today, we will be announcing a second round of funding for focus city teams. Four new cities, two in Latin America and the Caribbean, two in the Middle East and North Africa, will be chosen to join the five already selected.

We look forward to reporting on the early results of this innovating program in 2008 at the next World Urban Forum.

Thank you.