

Republic of Finland

Positions for United Nations Human Settlements Programme - Governing Council

I. Addressing Urban Water Distribution and Sanitation System

Proper urban water distribution and sanitation is an essential asset for all citizens and it is of the utmost importance to the Republic of Finland, which hopes to address this very dire matter. Our government understands that access to proper and sanitary water is vital for survival and is committed to work towards providing that right to all people around the globe in accordance with *Sustainable Development Goal 6* for clean water and sanitation for all. **Domestically**, Finland has prioritized accessibility to clean water for all of its citizens. In the *World Water Development Report* published by the United Nations in 2003, Finland was ranked as number one among 122 Member States when it came to water quality. 100 percent of the Finnish population has access to clean water and 97.6% of the population has access to sanitation facilities. Due to its unevenly distributed population and large number of municipalities, Finland depends on the local government of its municipalities for the proper distribution of clean water to citizens. Regarding water distribution, our government has created Joint Regional Municipal Authorities to provide a tool for cooperation between municipalities. Water distribution is not subsidized by our national government; as a result, municipalities are responsible for the provision of water by successfully coordinating water services development plans with municipal development. **Regionally**, Finland has consistently cooperated with its neighbors to ensure the safety and security of water supplies. On October 29, 2015, the Committee for a Sustainable Nordic Region, a body within the Nordic Council, adopted two resolutions regarding increased cooperation among the Nordic countries to safeguard the water supply, which the Finnish government supported. Through these resolutions, countries identified their respective areas of strength within the water resource area and have collaborated to implement similar measures throughout the region. For instance, the localization of water supply has made Finland's efforts in water distribution stronger and it has benefitted the urban areas. Furthermore, Finland was a major sponsor of the European Commission's *Directive 2000/60/EC*, also known as the *EU Water Framework Directive*, which has led to significant improvements in water quality and accessibility throughout Europe, especially in urban areas, by directly addressing pollution in Europe's river basins and involving both everyday citizens and the government in clean-up efforts. Finland is privileged to provide our citizens with clean and accessible water; therefore, we have used our abilities on an **international** scale. Hosting a session of the *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)* in Helsinki in 1992, Finland was a primary sponsor of the *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes*. Enactment of this Convention guaranteed that residents of urban areas who relied on transboundary sources for their water supply would have access to clean and safe water. In addition, our government supported and contributed to *UN Water's* policy brief *Eliminating Discrimination and Inequalities in Access to Water and Sanitation*, which gave policy instructions to states in ensuring that access to water was equal across all areas, both urban and rural. Finland has provided international support to countries where water distribution and sanitation is less available due to high poverty. In 2014, Finland supported the national *Water Services Trust Fund* in Kenya and the development of *Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)* in Ethiopia. According to the *Water Poverty Index*, Finland was one of the top-ten water rich nations in the world in 2002; given this, it is clear that our government has the sufficient capacity to assist other Member States with the problem of water distribution. The Republic of Finland acknowledges the importance of the provision of proper and sanitary water to residents of urban areas and **recommends** the following to this honorable body. *First*, our government believes that this body should focus attention on eutrophication, a form of water pollution. In order to do this, the Republic of Finland endorses the creation of a committee aimed to investigate and report the state of the water conditions and pollution levels in the bodies of water that are currently utilized for the purpose of water distribution. Through this, we hope to provide an avenue for Member States to battle the issue of water pollution in areas where the problem is most extensive. *Furthermore*, Finland advocates for the implementation of locally-managed water supply systems. This will ensure that public access to water is controlled locally to ensure ease of use by communities. The Republic of Finland is open to further negotiations from this honorable body and fellow Member States regarding the topic of urban water distribution and sanitation.

II. Providing Access to Adequate and Sustainable Housing

The UN's own *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* guarantees the right to a standard of living adequate for the well-being of the person, including adequate housing, a provision the Republic of Finland stands strongly beside. Our country stresses the importance of the government's responsibility in ensuring safe and adequate housing while taking environmental precautions for its citizens, regardless of economic and social standing.

Domestically, Finland has spearheaded innovative strategies in affordable and sustainable housing and has sponsored extensive projects. In 2008, our government implemented the *Finnish National Programme to Reduce Long-Term Homelessness* with the goal of ensuring housing for our most vulnerable citizens. Subsequently, by 2011, long-term homelessness was cut in half, as members of the Finnish population used 1,203 of the 1,697 supported housing units or care facilities provided by the government. Additionally, Finnish citizens have taken the responsibility of perpetuating the advancement of creating sustainable housing for their fellow countrymen, as evidenced by the actions of the Y-Foundation, a non-profit social enterprise that provides affordable rental housing and uses that income to maintain financial sustainability through reinvesting its surpluses into further expansion. Since its development, the homeless population in Finland has dropped from 20,000 in the 1980s to 7,500 in this decade.

Regionally, Finland, alongside its partners in the Nordic Council, have identified their collective national priorities in addressing sustainable housing, citing specific problem areas that our governments need to concentrate on, such as reducing housing segregation and maintaining city effectiveness, while still promoting ecological efficiency. We have also worked with our EU allies in contributing funds to UN-HABITAT to create projects with the goal of targeting sustainable housing. Our government along with other EU Member States, raised almost 200,000 Euros to assist EU integration in pushing for sustainable and adequate housing. This money was used to strengthen and enhance regional cooperation and urban management capacities. Finland and its neighboring nations, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, all have different approaches to achieve sustainability while maintaining affordability; however, we all share the same goal: provide our citizens with eco-sustainable and affordable housing.

Internationally, Finland has promoted sustainable housing through the cosponsoring of various projects, most of which originated from this committee. In 2003, the Finnish government donated 750,000 Euros to help UN-HABITAT supply sustainable housing to Kenyans living in the slums in Nairobi. Our government, alongside over 50 other Member States, is proud to have contributed to the General Assembly's *Report of the Human Settlements Programme (A/RES/32/162)*. The report affirmed resolutions pertaining to sustainable housing such as *A/RES/66/207*, which implemented the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and strengthened the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Finland has also agreed to the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)* where we hope to cooperate with other Member States in working towards *SDG 11*, which aims to promote adequate, affordable, and sustainable housing for citizens, through international compromise in the areas of efficient, innovative, and ecologically-friendly housing development. Even before the UN's 2030 Agenda was created, our country made strides in taking international involvement towards sustainable development in 1997, when the Finnish government created a sustainable development program that provided objectives for environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Our nation is one of the major contributors of UNEP's Environment Fund with a yearly donation of 6 million euros, showcasing our passion towards ecologically-conscious decisions regarding housing. The Republic of Finland understands the importance of the provision of adequate and sustainable housing to the world's citizens and **recommends** to this honorable body to implement the following procedures and advance the greater welfare to humanity. *First*, we suggest that Member States consider the reclamation of stable, but abandoned urban structures for the purposes of developing eco-sustainable and affordable living quarters. In this way, countries will save valuable funds and conserve urban planning space, all while creating housing welfare for its citizens. *Secondly*, we encourage members of this body to allow private sector involvement in the construction and design of adequate housing. Finland is proud to foster a government-private sector relationship that stimulates economic growth, creates jobs and promotes innovation in the housing sector, a relationship we wish to see other nations have within their borders. *Lastly*, we propose that fellow nations integrate slums into their public works system in order to improve the living conditions of the residents of these areas and acknowledge their existence as human dwellings. Through this policy, countries will promote the priority of their citizens' welfare. The Republic of Finland is open to further negotiations with fellow Member States in addressing the issue of adequate and sustainable housing.