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(The views expressed in this paper
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AN INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS SITUATION

The Present State

As in the past, the world housing situation is characterized by a deepening crisis, particularly in the countries of the third world. Out dated regulations, and, even worse, a sort of stagnation in new ideas and approaches has gradually become the hall mark of the effort to improve human settlements. After years of frustrating attempts it has not been possible to build cheaply enough to provide decent shelter for those in the low income groups.

The situation is exacerbated by a rapid population growth, which in the case of the developing world, is in a scale unprecedented in history. Where some years ago, a city of 100,000 was considered big, planners now are beginning to think on terms of urban agglomerations approaching population figures of 50 millions.

So far as the African region is concerned, urban growth is proceeding at a much more accelerated rate than economic growth and urban industrialization. This fact, along with others, is in stark contrast with what has occurred in, say, Europe under similar circumstances.

What is more growth of the urban population is taking place on the absence of a food surplus which the agricultural system ought to provide a self-sustaining basis. As is well-known, African Agriculture is relatively under-developed and as such unable to provide the requisite surplus.

Because Urbanization in Africa is growing at a faster rate than urban industrialization, the typical urban centres evolving in the continent are largely based on service economies. The result of all this is that the present development of urban systems particularly in Africa is so unique, that it is not appropriate to copy solutions and approaches to the problem from Europe or America.

Nevertheless settlement systems have evolved which are ill understood and insufficiently described by official statistics. Such settlements have eluded close study and it has been impossible to extract clear patterns and trends of their growth and development.

For more than two decades, U.N. documents amongst others, have pointed out the mounting crisis in this area, to the extent perhaps, of giving the impression that the breaking point, however is defined, is around the corner. Yet the breaking point never comes. As a recent article in *Ekistics* has pointed out, no decree has stopped squatters. People continue to improve and change their dwellings. Organized and unorganized self-help is occurring all over the world. These changes are occurring willy-hilly of policy makers. A recent book suggests that the so called informal sector in Nairobi created 50,000 jobs. These figures are not registered officially, and probably never will. Our understanding of the development of human settlements in