# ADDRESSING URBANISATION

## A Way Forward for the Anglican Communion

The Report on the Visit of representatives of the Urban Bishops' Panel of the Church of England to New York, September 2000.

**Background**

As an outcome of the 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution on Urban Globalisation[1], the Bishop of New York, the Rt Revd. Richard Grein, invited three members[2] of the Urban Bishops' Panel (UBP) to visit New York and the United Nations in order to explore issues of funding, models of networking, and relations with United Nations programmes, all with reference to that Resolution.

The Anglican Consultative Council had already affirmed the intention of the Lambeth Resolution by agreeing[3] to the setting up of an international Programme designed to identify and develop urban resources across the Anglican Communion, and within this Programme it is intended to establish a global Anglican Network so that specialists, theologians and missioners from each Province can share their stories, insights and expertise one with another in an inter-disciplinary manner. It is hoped that the outcome of these endeavours might be an Anglican Commission on 'Christian Presence and Witness in an Urbanising World'.

**Meeting the Urban Church**

In New York the group visited the Episcopal Church Centre to meet relevant staff and learn about the Jubilee Ministries programme[4]. The importance of non-hierarchical networking, and empowerment and training for mission in local congregations were affirmed. Long-term engagement rather than short-term fixes was deemed crucial.

Meetings in Harlem and the South Bronx with key practitioners provided examples of where the subjugation of personal egos had led to teamwork and effective neighbourhood renewal of the first order. Already the most significant local presence in these communities, the Churches were working together to inculcate a fresh sense of identity and belonging[5]. The way in which each of their campaigns against drug abuse, armed assault and inadequate housing had to be carefully coordinated

reinforced appreciation of how simultaneous local action and global thinking are today essential.

The dire housing conditions of this part of New York contrasted sharply with the luxurious development of Hoboken and the lower West-side of Manhattan which the visiting group viewed from New Jersey. International financiers are changing the shape of urban life through de-industrialisation and development, whilst 'edge cities' are emerging in the New York region. The Church is having to adjust to these new phenomena which are now being reproduced around the globe.

Before embarking on the second phase of the visit the group were inspired to hear the news that the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA had recently endorsed the Lambeth Resolution on Global Urbanisation and lent their weight to the giving of "urgent attention" to the issues and the formation of an Anglican Network and Project in preparation for a Commission on faith in an urban world. The visiting group received such affirmation of the proposals as to be quite overwhelming, and this affirmation was to be replicated by the United Nations personnel which it then went on to meet.

**United Nations interest**

The group was first welcomed by the UN Director of the Division for Sustainable Energy and Environment[6] who reinforced awareness of how interdependent is the relationship between the rural and the urban. Quite clearly, the environment is no longer the concern only of the wealthy as the 'footprint' of ever-more demanding cities presses hard upon the whole planet. The collapse of vulnerably positioned poor housing, the spread of water-born disease, and the new awareness of 'sustainability' as 'quality' gives rise to an increasing openness by the powers that be, not least the UN itself, to partnership with many other NGOs and particularly the faith communities. The group became aware just how timely this Anglican initiative is as it was spelt out to them that no longer can international decisions be made on a cost-analysis basis alone, but the moral and ethical dimension must now be stressed and acted upon. The UN at the highest level welcomes this initiative by the Anglican Communion and hopes that other faith communities will follow this lead. They clearly need and welcome the moral arguments being rehearsed.

The UN Director of the Division of Social Policy and Development[7], recently returned from organising the Geneva UN conference on poverty issues, underscored how important it is to the UN and to global wellbeing that we Network wherever possible so that we act in concert to address the issues which are overwhelming the vast majority of the world's population now living in urban environments. He felt that the establishment of a political will is of the essence in eradicating world urban poverty and welcomed the inclusion of the Anglican Communion in that endeavour, recognising that the Communion is often well-placed to have political influence around the world. He promised the support of the UN statistical division in our work. There was a recognition of the importance of the work of the International Labour Organisation in learning to understand the significance of the informal sector in urban employment issues around the globe.

With the interim Anglican Communion UN Observer, Bishop Herbert Donovan and his colleague Canon Jeff Golliher, the group had a valuable private meeting with Mr. Nitan Desai, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. Mr Desai saw the Communion as offering precisely what the Secretary General, Mr Kofi Anan, is at present welcoming - a clear moral voice from a faith perspective, based upon real and committed experience of the urban. He cited many UN programmes, e.g. on HIV/AIDS, slum enhancement, saving street children, where this perspective and experience could be crucial for the future. Our theological commitment to a concern for human rights and care for the creation, along with our holistic emphasis and our physical presence alongside and as the urban poor could assist the moral well-being of the city as well as its physical regeneration. Mr Desai felt our intervention to be timely and welcome.

The group then met with the UN 'Habitat' programme[8] (UN Centre for Human Settlements) who have a particular concern for the impact of urbanisation upon the world and the need for adequate shelter and good urban governance. The inevitability of global urbanisation was substantiated by statistical trends and the UN were now committed to address this issue in partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations and the Civil Society. The Communion must be represented, the group were told, at Habitat's major international conferences on these urban issues where determinative

decisions were made, and especially at the summit conference 'Habitat + 5' where their ongoing programme would be further developed. The UN were working with the World Bank on its 'Cities without Slums' campaign and the commitment of the faith communities would be essential in this endeavour. The Anglican Communion would bring its local and regional presence and experience in both the developed and developing world as it collaborates with the UN in initiatives on secure tenure and urban governance.

**Sharing the Vision**

Finally, the visiting group were invited to report on the week's visit at the Cathedral Eucharist so that the Christian community at large were able to hear of what had been accomplished. The visiting group wishes to record it gratitude for the support it received from Bishops Grein and Donovan in enabling the visit and thereby helping to develop their proposals which will be discussed with the ACC standing committee in October 2000.

The planning group has recently published *The Impact of the Global: An Urban Theology* by Bishop Laurie Green. The booklet explores a theological response to the twin phenomena of urbanisation and globalisation and was welcomed by the New York hosts as a helpful tool in alerting people around the Communion to the Programme.

**Some Conclusions:**

1. The Project initiators are greatly **encouraged by the response** it has thus far received from around the world and now by UN, ECUSA, and many local urban ministers. The connections now made has already **increased the scope of the growing Network.** The Anglican Communion seems to be the first faith community to approach the UN on these issues and our overtures are more than welcome and timely.
2. There is clearly a wave of new thinking in the UN concerning **the potential of faith communities** and NGOs to deliver value-based work in the poorest urban communities. The Communion's work promises to be **Good News for the urban**

**poor** across the globe through their presence, witness and social ministries in these communities.

3. **The Anglican Urban Network** must be non-hierarchical and from now on must be independent of the Urban Bishop's Panel of the Church of England. It's programmes must be rooted in the local whilst serving our communities globally and ecumenically. It must bring together people at all levels and from many disciplines, but must have a theological and missional heart.
4. The new issues which globalisation is forcing upon the urban creates new situations which require new responses and hence **new forms of urban mission training**. We are already being asked from around the world to coordinate a response to this need.
5. The next stage in our process must be the establishment of sufficient administrative capacity to deal with responses to the request to each Province for its delegates to the project, from which **the core steering group will be formed**. The Communion will then be informed, through *Anglican World* and Bishop Laurie Green's booklet, of the issues and the Programme so that the Network can grow. It is essential that the Network and Steering Group should send, in June 2001, **an Anglican delegation to the Habitat+5 World Summit** on these issues, and also work with the Anglican UN Office in New York and our own ACC and Anglican Communion Office. The delegation can be serviced and briefed by Dr Davey and Canon Golliher.
6. We have a concern that to facilitate all **the work which these global contacts and requests are eliciting now requires constant research-updating and administrative capacity**. Our current co-ordinator, Dr Andrew Davey, is doing this very well but this is in addition to his already large portfolio of work for the Church of England. This question must be addressed immediately if this international Urban Programme for the Anglican Communion is to respond to the time-scale within which we must work.

Bishop Laurie Green.
Bishop of Bradwell, England.
September 2000.

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[1] The Lambeth Conference Resolution II.7, on Urbanization reads:

This conference: a) calls upon the member Churches of the Anglican Communion to address the processes of urbanization across the world, both in our cities and all other communities; b) asks our Member Churches to give urgent attention to 'Living and Proclaiming the Good News' in our cities so that all that destroys our full humanity is being challenged, the socially excluded are being welcomed and the poor are hearing the Good News (Matthew 11.3); and in order to assist this priority in mission c) resolves i) to ask the Anglican Consultative Council to give support to the formation of an Anglican Urban Network to share information and experience on urbanization and urban mission; ii) to support the establishment of a 'Faith in an Urban World' Commission, after due consultation with ecumenical bodies.

[2] The members of the delegation were The Rt Revd. Roger Sainsbury –Bishop of Barking and Chair of UBP; The Rt Revd. Dr. Laurie Green – Bishop of Bradwell; and the Revd. Dr. Andrew Davey-Assistant Secretary of the Board for Social Responsibility and Secretary to the UBP.

[3] Resolution 29 of the eleventh meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council reads: ACC 11 (a) thanks the groups and individuals who have worked so far on these significant issues and encourages them to work together to bring these issues before the churches of the Anglican Communion; (b) encourages those who are creating an Urban Network to continue to work towards being recognised in due course as an official Network of the Anglican Communion, and recommends that they are in touch with the Secretary General to discover the Guidelines by which networks are recognised; (c) welcomes the proposals of a project to identify and develop urban resources in the Anglican Communion; (d) asks the Urban Network to prepare a further report for ACC-12 regarding the scope and viability of a 'Faith in an Urban World' Commission.

[4] The Revd Canon Carmen Guerrero, the National Jubilee Officer and the Ven. Michael Kendall who specialises in Urban and Global Episcopal Mission introduced the session.

[5] The group was hosted by Canon Fred Williams and the Revd Bertram Bennett. The projects are described in *Signs of Hope in the City* edited by Carle and Decaro. (Judson Press, Valley Forge. 1997)

[6] Mr Roberto Lenton, accompanied by Dr Charles McNeill.

[7] The Hon. John Langmore.

[8] The outgoing secretary Dr Aliye Pekin Celik met the group.