

Beijing Declaration Concerning Urban Culture

(June 11, 2007)

At the invitation of the Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Culture, and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, PRC, more than 1000 mayors, planners, architects, cultural scholars, historians and experts involved in urban culture from 23 countries and regions around the world gathered here in Beijing, the world famous ancient and cultural capital from June 9 to 11, 2007, to discuss such topics as the transition of urban culture in the era of globalization, protection and conservation of cultural heritage, and the development of contemporary urban culture.

Participants of the Conference acknowledge the unique role cities played as a cultural phenomenon in human civilization. The history of cities shows that culture has always been the outstanding urban composition. A city is not only the economic and political center but also the cultural center of the region concerned. The participants fully appreciated the contributions of the Athens Charter(1933), the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage(1972), the Charter of Machu Picchu(1977), and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions(2005) on urban development and urban culture. In the meantime, the participants have taken note of the huge challenge brought about by urbanization and globalization even though they have resulted in economic growth, cultural prosperity and a rising living standard. Cities are in danger of losing their traditions; they tend to appear homogeneous; their image is becoming vulgar; and their environment is deteriorating. The threats of destruction resulting from construction and destructive construction still exist, and urban culture is in the process of transition. Today, the urban population for the first time in human history has surpassed rural population. During our open debate on the evolution of cities and

the reevaluation of the relationship between urban culture and urban development, we have reached the consensus as follows, which are publicized in the form of this Beijing Declaration.

I. The urban culture in the new millennium should reflect the characteristics of ecological civilization. The city is the greatest creation of human beings, and it is also one of the key factors leading to some major changes in the world. The human-centered development theory characterized by plundering natural resources is no longer desirable. Reducing the pressure on the environment from urban development, restoring the destroyed eco-system, and achieving a harmonious relationship between man and Nature, urban area and the countryside should become the cornerstone for urban development. Such traditional Chinese philosophies as the unity of man and Nature and holding Nature in awe are considered not only treasures of world culture but also some of the basic and valuable guidelines for today's urban development. Cities in the 21st century should be eco-cities.

II. Urban development should adequately reflect the interest of citizens. The city is the residence of urban dwellers. It is also their spiritual homeland. As the citizens are the masters of their city as well as the source and driving force of urban culture, urban planning and construction should evolve with their interest. It should be the basic value and code of conduct for us to face the citizens and respond to the requirements of different groups, especially the poor, the disadvantaged, and the marginalized. The historic mission of contemporary planners, architects and cultural scholars should be: making an in-depth and scientific study about the needs of citizens on housing, transportation, environment and emotions, and building a city of humanistic culture. The interest of the public should be paramount in urban planning and construction as well as the development of urban culture. In this regard, mayors shoulder an especially important responsibility. They should ensure that local citizens have the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process of urban development. Any good decision should be the choice of citizens. Bettering the life of citizens should be the essence

of urban development.

III. The development of urban culture is an important part of urban development. The moral standard, values, way of thinking, social mentality, cultural and scientific literacy, activities, traditional customs, emotions and faiths of the citizens reflect the level of cultural development in a city. In urban planning and construction, special emphasis should be placed on the development of urban culture. The form and layout of the city should be based on the local and traditional culture; the appearance and feature of the city should reflect its core spirit; and the architecture and facilities of the city should meet the basic cultural and material needs of its citizens. It is the basic requirement and goal to build a city with a soul. In this information age, culture, as a key function of the city, is playing an even more important role. Culture is one of the major driving forces of urban development. The development of urban culture, improvement in the services function, and lifting the taste of the city are still a long way off.

IV. Local specific characteristics should be stressed in urban planning and construction. Many cities around the world are looking more and more alike while blocks and buildings with distinct local flavor are being replaced by standardized development projects. Unique local cultures and characteristics are disappearing during urban renewal. Facing the adverse impacts on ethnic and local cultures brought about by globalization and modernization, we should, through rational urban planning, wide public participation and effective administration, design the streets, squares and buildings in such a way that they can reflect the inner beauty, senses and values of our cities. The unique characteristics of a city should be embedded in every single detail and event. These unique characteristics will improve the competitiveness of the city. Innovation based on the background is the key to creating a unique “personality” of the city. Absurdity, which is against the tradition and normal life, is not the right approach. A successful city should have a rich cultural tradition, a connotative cultural environment, and a nice amenity. A successful city should not

only be a latter-day attraction, but also be the glory of history and the pride of the nation.

V. Urban culture not only carries on traditions but also blazes a new trail. Cities are the collective memory of the entire human race. The evolution of cities is an important component of our cultural heritage, which provides people with a sense of belonging and identity. The development of urban culture should be based on the local history and tradition so that the impact of excessive commercial development and improper utilization of the cultural heritage and environment could be minimized. A successful city should be reborn without losing its unique cultural identity. The vitality of a city lies in its capacity of innovation. Therefore, city administrators should promote creative industries and service industry, foster economic upgrading and transition, and improve the urban functions so that it could meet the needs of today's citizens and facilitate the all-round development of people. They should also learn from cultures of the world and extend the scope of the national culture so that the local culture could enjoy a more promising future. We do need commercial and industrial cities. What we need more are cultural cities.

We share a common vision: in the 21st century, people all over the world could join hands to make this planet a better place to live. We share a common faith: cities in the 21st century should be a harmonious place for people and the Nature.