

## Canadian IYSH conference

**T**HE need for innovative co-operation between the sectors involved in housing and social development was highlighted at a Canadian conference held to observe the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Held in Ottawa from 13 to 16 September, the conference attracted 1,400 registrants and included representation from many different institutions and organisations concerned with action for shelter. Some 68 individuals were invited from developing countries. They were funded from Canadian sources.

Housing finance was given due importance at a major plenary session on "The Economics, Environment and Political Climate of Homelessness and Shelter," chaired by George Anderson, president of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. At this session Michael Cohen, a World Bank official, pointed to the results of the Bank's programme, which has spent \$5 billion on over 100 housing projects in 50 countries since 1972.

He said, however, that the provision of housing and services must be closely inter-related if the poor are to benefit.

Jorge Hardoy, director for human settlements, International Institute for Environment and Development, told the plenary session that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may be the most promising mechanisms for delivering efficient habitat programmes. He cited especially the work of poor people's community-based efforts to improve housing conditions in many countries. He proposed the creation of an international fund "to allow any national or local NGOs that assist a community organisation to act as guarantor for credits requested from a national agency."

Prof. Lise Poulin-Simon, from the University of Laval in Quebec City,

concluded the plenary session with a powerful presentation on the political economy of homelessness in Canada. With over a million Canadians unemployed, she said, 1.3 million sought some form of social assistance in 1985, and she estimated the true number of homeless in Canada at 300,000.

In another panel session, Chester Hartman, an urban planner and fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, said that 2.5 million people are forcibly displaced in the United States every year. With perhaps two or three million Americans in homeless conditions and the number increasing by 25% per year, the US legal system has been slow to respond to these needs.

"Housing and Economic Development" was the topic of a Forum Session which explored the potential for housing development to generate employment, capital formation and the fostering of new or expanded manufacturing and service industries. This was chaired by Assistant Deputy Minister of Housing from Ontario, Len Pitura, and included Eric Carlson, IUBSSA senior consultant. The session reviewed the range of efforts to produce more realistic assistance and investment for housing improvement.

In the keynote address to the Conference, Dr Arcot Ramachandran, executive director, UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in Nairobi, challenged housing finance institutions, particularly building societies and savings and loan entities, to do more to mobilise resources for the basic problems of shelter in so many countries of the world. He said that more than 350 million people have joined the ranks of the urban poor in developing nations over the past decade.

A forum session on "Funding Appropriate Shelter" addressed the costs of land, construction, financing

and long-term management (both social and physical). It was pointed out that conservative governments are forcing social housing developers to find innovative ways of financing new projects. Pension funds, especially those in the public sector, could be a most important source of new financing for low-income housing in the next 10 years, but legislative and regulatory changes are required if significant progress is to be made.

"Financing Shelter in Developing Countries," was the subject of a workshop which included presentations on the innovative approaches being developed in Sri Lanka by the National Housing Development Authority, and in Turkey, through the programmes of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing.

Other sessions of special interest included those on housing co-operatives in developing countries; the role of NGOs in shelter upgrading and in economic development in the third world; partnerships: community-based and municipal non-profits; housing the homeless and poor: new relationships in the welfare state.

In all, the Conference included 80 specialised workshops; three groupings of seven concurrent forum sessions; and three main plenary sessions on the problems of homelessness. The was also a Shelter Exposition, organised housing tours, and film showing. The Conference was co-sponsored by the Canadian Association of Housing and Renewal Officials (CAHRO) and the International Council on Social Welfare-Canada (ICSW-Canada).

The closing plenary session, chaired by Reg Ryan, president, Mortgage Insurance Co of Canada, featured a discussion of strategies for effectively implementing the objectives of the IYSH, and a closing address by Stephen Lewis, ambassador and permanent representative of Canada to the United Nations. ■