**Civil Society Statement on World Habitat Day Regarding Preparations for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)**

*Text signed by 137 networks, civil society movements, universities and individuals from 31 countries.*

The General Assembly of the United Nations announced 2016 as the year to host the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, also known as Habitat III. Habitat III's first preparatory meeting was held in New York in September 2014.

For civil society organizations internationally, this conference means the possibility of a New Habitat Agenda, not only a New Urban Agenda. It should consider both rural and urban areas as one continuous territory, while focusing on the realization of the right to adequate housing and habitat.

It will also identify international standards to promote: first, the right to the city, land, and territory; second, quality transportation for safe and inclusive urban mobility; third, environmentally-friendly usage and production of energy, and lastly, a sense of community.

In 1976, the Habitat I Conference in Vancouver adopted the Declaration on Human Settlements. Although the Conference occurred during a period of rapid urbanization, the participants never lost sight of the rural-urban relationship. The Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996 also achieved significant advances regarding the right to housing in the Habitat Agenda, due largely to civil society participation.

Despite these achievements, we cannot ignore the current processes of speculative urban developments, financialisation of housing, property and mortgages, as well as land grabbing witnessed around the world. These processes often violate basic human rights and lead to sprawl of cities and social segregation with serious impact on human lives , nature and territories. Moreover, it violates the right of all people to live in peace, dignity and safety without discrimination.

For our organizations, the symbiotic relationship between rural and urban areas cannot be ignored. The policies of recent decades have sought to weaken rural areas and empty their populations in favor of big agribusiness, often promoted by multinational corporations. This has allowed cities to grow at the expense of rural land. We disagree with the hegemonic model of development from which these policies are derived; they are the cause of the seizure of territories of indigenous peoples and peasants, as well as the destruction of their habitat and sources of income. These policies have also increased criminal violence that provokes mass migrations, increased poverty, and a loss of cultural and community practices. All this makes life difficult for those not concentrated in the cities.

These dire consequences require that the discussions, proposals and resolutions of Habitat III focus primarily on human rights and the state obligations which result from them. Alternative proposals from grassroots and civil society organizations should be considered in Habitat III, such as:

-The evaluation of the implementation of the Habitat II Agenda and its corresponding Global Plan of Action;

-The promotion of measures to overcome inequalities , discrimination, segregation and lack of opportunity to habitat and adequate living conditions in both the city and country;

-The development of proposals to create tools for: participatory planning and budgeting, institutional support for the social production of habitat, democratization of territorial management areas, citizen control, coordination with planning actors of the public sector, habitat production and management, as well as the recognition of the social function of property.

All this, among other things, is made explicit and developed in the framework of the Right to the City that endorses struggles, experiences and expectations of urban residents as subjects of law.

At the same time, HABITAT III should encourage measures that promote responsible production and consumption, avoiding distortions of the "green economy". In the new agenda, there must be tools to prevent and compensate for human rights violations related to habitat, particularly the dispossession of territories, evictions and forced displacement of populations caused by megaprojects and infrastructure works. It should also emphasize the enforcement of existing rules which guarantee these rights that states ignore or distort systematically (disregard toward the right to consultation and free consent, absence of public demonstrations, evaluation of social impacts, and abuse of the concept of public utility among others). Finally, in HABITAT III, beyond the plan to construct resilient cities, measures must be designed to address the root causes of environmental degradation and climate change. These measures question the economic development models that are based on unlimited growth, which rarely take into account social and cultural factors.

None of this will be possible if, in HABITAT III, civil society does not participate equally with respect to the other actors. This is especially important for issues such as representation in national committees, access to information, and the inclusion of their concerns and proposals on national and international debates throughout the process. In order to guarantee social participation in Habitat III, methods must be produced to facilitate appropriate conditions in the planning, during, and after the conference. All must have access to information and logistical support for all social proposals during each phase of the process. It is important to note that social participation must reflect gender equity, facilitation of various age groups, inclusion of people with disabilities, and representatives of indigenous peoples, with respect for their customs.

It is essential that the new Habitat Agenda include the participation of social movements and civil society organizations. It should address the diversity of interests and practices. Therefore, we demand that this international effort recognizes innovations by the popular sector, which frequently faces opposition and even criminalization, in order to achieve more just, democratic and sustainable cities in which human rights are fulfilled. We wish to build another possible city and another possible world.

The City is a Right, not a commodity!

Housing is a Right, not a commodity!

The territory is a Right, not a commodity!

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