



HIC - Towards Just Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages

## **Towards Just Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages**

NGO Global Forum

NGO Treaty on Urbanization

Since World War II, a model of development focused on economic growth, capital accumulation and profit has been consolidated. The well being of humanity has been cast in a minor role and unlimited greed has led to concentrations of wealth and poverty. To achieve increasing growth corporations and governments are using up the planet's resources, destroying the environment and polarizing citizens and countries into rich and poor categories.

Economic growth based on industrial expansion and consumption has displaced rural populations from their land and intensified urbanization, creating a growing world-wide metropolis and critical problems of impoverishment and environmental degradation.

Cities are the centre of political and economic processes and the accumulation of capital, organised globally. They are the command centres of vast networks, integrating the rural and the urban. Thus, there is a close relationship among rural, urban and environmental issues.

Millions of people live in urban centres with critical problems of water, air and soil pollution, with no chance to meet their basic need for food, housing, water, sanitation, drainage, waste disposal and public transport.

This jeopardizes their health and even reproduction, and over-burdens women, who have the main responsibility for managing everyday life within the family and the community.

Impoverishment and environmental degradation are getting more acute as a consequence of neo-liberal policies. Multilateral finance agencies and governments are withdrawing from their obligations to invest in urban infrastructure or even to have any social policies thus denying many their rights to full citizenship. The scale of this has no precedent in modern history. The result is that women are forced to assume increased burdens, because of their role in the home and popular organization in the community.

Monopoly capital is encroaching on public space as facilities and services are privatized without any consideration of citizens' interests in presenting or improving their quality of life.

Free market policies on the provision of health, education and housing deny impoverished people access to these services, both in the North and the South. The result is increasing numbers of homeless people, street children, slums, tenements and unserviced urban areas, with precarious public transport, unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation and waste disposal. Above all, this leads to the destruction of people's identity, cultural values and family structures, with increasing numbers of women heading households.

Another consequence is urban violence, murder and oppression of orphans, children, women and homeless people, not sparing the leaders of social movements that struggle for democracy and improvement in standards of living.

Contrary to the neo-liberal thought, the state must initiate public policies that invert these priorities. It must address the needs of those who are being impoverished by structural adjustment programmes by structural adjustment programmes and ensure just social relations.

We need to create a new sustainable development model, aimed at humanity's well-being in harmony with nature based on participatory democracy and social justice, for present and future generations, without gender, economic, social, political or religious discrimination.

The active participation of civil society, especially the social movements, popular associations and organizations that produce new actors, is essential to building this new model. These organizations need to be recognized by governments and international agencies as legitimate spokespersons of the people, in the spirit of democratic participation.



Radical changes are needed in the present and future conditions of life of the majority of the population, and this is only possible with effective implementation of agrarian reform, urban reform and reform of the state. Restructuring of the international institutions which are part of the UN system the international Monetary Fund World Bank and UNCHS (habitat) can reduce dependency of sovereign nations on the centres of power, and lead to a change in social policies of governments of the North toward people and governments of the South.

There is need for urban transformation based on the ever-widening participation of citizens in policy and decision making at local, national and international level, where political and cultural values can be change.

#### Basic Principles

The Right to Citizenship, which is understood as the participation of inhabitants of cities, towns and villages in deciding their own future, It includes their right to land and means of livelihood it includes their right housing sanitation, health, education, food, job opportunities, public transport, leisure and information, it includes their right to freedom of organization, with respect for minorities and ethnic sexual and cultural pluralities. It includes the preservation of citizens cultural and historical heritage and their access to a culturally rich and diversified environment. With no distinctions of gender, nationality, race, language or religion belief.

Democratic management at local level which is understood as a form of planning, producing, operating and governing, cities, towns and villages with control by participation of civil society. It entails the enhancement of popular participation and to strengthening of local self-government, including its autonomy.

The social function of the city and property, which is understood as the common interest prevailing over individual rights to property, so that citizens have a social and a physical space where the democratic decision making process can take place. This includes the process of producing and creating knowledge within parameters of social justice, and the creation of environmentally sustainable conditions.

#### Proposals

To democratise cities, towns and villages through fulfilment of all existing national and international rights and through creating new rights which give priority to allocation of common resources to the impoverished population locally, nationally and internationally.

To bring the design, planning and management of human settlements within the physical limits of the environment and infrastructure, in order to create an ecological balance and conserve the historic and cultural heritage and practices.

To create linkages between the public, private and social sectors through participatory mechanisms in the formation of public policies. These must be based on appropriated technologies which maximize the use of natural resources within a sustainable framework.

To create mechanisms of control by civil society and local government over the resources obtained or raised, as well as management of international debt for investment in the areas under their control.

To guarantee a new equilibrium between cities and rural areas, by eliminating intermediaries in the trade and facilitating direct relations between producer and consumers. This entails decentralizing supply centres and supporting popular organizations. It also entails the management of technology processes so that the rural inhabitants can regain their clean air, water and soil.

Universalization of basic sanitation services and infrastructure with equitable access for all users.

To increase and ensure the participation of the population specially women, in legal and administrative mechanisms that promote their new role in processes of planning control and decision-making.

To promote the right to information, including access of the popular sectors to the mass media.

To promote and facilitate the setting up funds at a local, national and international level for the production of housing, building materials and civic facilities. The funds should be autonomous but subject to social control.

To facilitate the use of public funds to create micro enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of income and productive employment.



To give priority to various modes of public transport, promoting non-polluting systems.

To support campaigns for women's equal access and rights to land and housing, and to take measures to reinforce the leadership roles of women and social movements, such as supporting women's Action Agenda 21.

To promote social economic, environmental and legal conditions in which forced evictions, displacement, resettlement or migration are not possible without the informed consent of the people concerned.

#### Commitments

The signatories of this treaty agree to create and participate in a Global Forum Towards Just, Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages. This Forum will contribute to the advancement of social movements for building a life with dignity in cities, towns and villages, widening the environmental, economic, social, cultural and political, rights of the residents. It will contribute to changing the management of these settlements and improving quality of life, creating an environment to be enjoyed by present and future generations.

This Forum undertakes to endorse actions in favour of the popular sectors which have suffered most from the process of social exclusion imposed by the current model of development.

Commitments to the Treaty include:

- a) Documenting and denouncing mass evictions, other violations of housing rights, and those related to environmental deterioration and destruction.
- b) To promote local, national, regional and international, exchange of experiences, information, expertise and technical assistance among the signatories of this treaty.
- c) To carry out acts of solidarity and support for individuals, groups and organizations facing oppression or retaliation for their work in defense of the right to citizenships, the right to housing and/or the protection of their environment.
- d) To systematize, analyse and disseminate knowledge, and to facilitate new research, which will advance action and social change in cities, towns and villages, housing and environment. This Knowledge should link popular organizations support institutions and social research for the purpose of living strength to their work and social struggle.
- e) To support and assist in networking, pressure actions and lobbying at local, national, regional and international levels, in defence of principles and proposals included in this Treaty.
- f) To use all opportunities to strengthen the local, national, regional and international links among social movements, NGOs, Forum and local self-government.
- g) To facilitate initiative for networking and joint action among the signatories of this Treaty, to enhance effective local action.

To ensure effective constitution of the Global Forum Towards Just, Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages, the signatories agree to set up a joint committee, consisting of the representative each from Habitat International Coalition (HIC), the Continental Front of Community Organizations (FCOC), and the Forum to Urban Reform.

Rio de Janeiro, June 1992

Additional NGOs and CBOS who wish to become signatories to the Treaty and members of the Global Forum are invited to contact the [HIC Secretariat](#).