

Executive Summary

## Habitat Voices Manifesto: A Socially and Environmentally Just Response to COVID-19

*Habitat International Coalition (HIC), July 2021*

Responses to COVID-19 and its consequences need to uphold habitat-related human rights and build a present and future based on social and environmental justice. HIC's manifesto outlines essential principles and state obligations for transformative and redistributive recovery, with actions and commitments going beyond "resilience" by remedying existing and emerging inequalities through equitable and sustainable development.

### Deepened existing and emerging inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore global habitat conditions that reflect deep pre-existing injustices due to privatization, speculation and dispossession that have unequally distributed common goods and services essential to everyone's daily life. In addition, many virus-containment measures have widened disparities between those who can and cannot comply, impacting especially those enduring multiple forms of discrimination. Self-care capacities differ, forcing ever-increasing millions of impoverished inhabitants into overcrowding under poor hygienic conditions, unable to isolate while facing multiple eviction practices. Large numbers of the urban poor work under precarious conditions and do not have other choices than to work in public places, increasing the risk of contracting COVID-19. Amid crisis and confinement, abuse of women, children and older persons has increased. Education, internet, hospitalization, or social protection facilities and access vastly differ across social segments. In many rural communities, health and social services are scarce.

### An alternative global pact and action plan

A long period of development efforts rooted in models of capitalist speculation, subsidizing private interests, and unequal "economic growth" has undermined entire generations' lives and opportunities. As a result, public and universal health, education, housing, services, employment and social-protection systems have been eroded. An international pact and action plan must pursue grounded alternatives that challenge foregone theories and mobilise the resources required to bring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to life for all people, everywhere.

### Collective management, common goods, and development States

This crisis has proved and validated collective capacity for self-built settlements, cooperative processes, popular civil-defense, and social production and management of habitat. Such survival and solidarity practices have always characterized social struggles for land, housing, services, education, security and health. The State must now recognize and support these processes as a stronger duty holder and guarantor of rights, bearing in mind that these processes also help to combat the pandemic.



States should ensure:

1. Profound economic redistribution

Structural transformation requires adopting a feminist perspective across the defense of all habitat rights, enforcing the social function of property and land; criminalizing forced eviction; reversing privatization of public and communal land, goods and services; more-progressive taxation of individuals and corporations, land and property; budget reallocation to socio-environmental protection and climate justice, investing in solidarity economies and demilitarization.

2. Recognition of differences and invisibilities

To be truly transformative, a profound economic redistribution relies on the recognition of differences, invisibilities and inequalities. It is urgent to protect everyone from discrimination, stigmatization and marginalization; actively combating racism, promoting gender equality, valuing multiple social identities, social production and management of habitat; cooperativism; caregiving and social reproduction primarily performed by women, solidarity economies, bio/cultural diversity, and integrated rural/suburban/urban development.

3. Parity in political participation

Mechanisms, at various scales, are needed for universal and inclusive democratic participation that does not marginalize anyone on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, class, age, ethnicity, religion, physical or mental ability, or any other status.

4. Human rights habitat, not war

Like the UN Secretary-General, we urge a global ceasefire to prioritize together COVID-19 responses and recovery, prompt and meaningful reallocation of resources away from militarism, ending foreign and military occupations, and upholding extraterritorial human rights obligations.

5. Mutual care and solidarity

As indeed we are all in this together, each of us bears both a personal and a social responsibility to take all measures possible to stop the spread of COVID-19. In addition we need to actively practice mutual care and solidarity, and avoid the gratuitous production of waste and release of toxins of any kind. This includes reducing consumption of fossil fuels and animal products.

We need new and deeper forms of redistribution, recognition, parity in political participation, protection of human rights and promotion of mutual care and solidarity, in order to collectively advance habitat-related rights and the right to the city in a world where all can live in peace and dignity.

