



Minutes of the meeting of the 2009 HIC General Assembly

First Part: Perebebuí House, Pedreira Neighborhood, Belém do Pará, Brazil

January 30, 2009, from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM

1. Review of quorum

33 people attended the General Assembly meeting; of whom 12 were members of the Coalition with voting rights; representing the following HIC structures: the regions of Latin America, North America and Asia; HLRN and Women & Habitat networks. See the list of participants [here](#).

2. Welcome by HIC Vice President

Anelise Meléndez welcomed everyone by explaining the special nature of this meeting of the HIC General Assembly. Given the high cost of travelling to Belém, many HIC members, among them President Davinder Lamba, were unable to attend. Therefore, the gathering in Belém will be a first meeting; the second part, which will cover the institutional topics required by the HIC constitution (for example, the review of financial resources) will take place in Cairo, Egypt, in May 2009. Anelise Meléndez explained the Assembly agenda, the working method, as well as the publications available on Coalition activities (link to 2007 report).

3. Approval of previous minutes and Agenda

Charlotte Mathivet stressed that the proposals emerging from this meeting will be included in the agenda of the next meeting in Cairo and will be justified by the regional and thematic representatives present here in Belém. The minutes of the 2008 General Assembly meeting in Barcelona will be officially reviewed in Cairo. The agenda of this first meeting was approved by the participants.

Regional reports

4.1 HIC MENA (Middle East and North Africa)

Joe Schechla presented the progress of HIC Middle East and North Africa, emphasizing work done on land rights; from an initial assessment of this emphasis in Egypt, the methodology will be defined for the other countries of the region. The emphasis is on access to land, related to water rights and in conjunction with the consolidation of housing networks in Africa. This work has been published and widely disseminated in Arabic and English, and is awaiting translation into French and possibly Spanish.

An important issue in this region is the conflict in Palestine; it is crucial to share strategies on housing rights, against evictions and the destruction of dwellings in this conflict. HIC MENA expresses the international solidarity in this regard.

4.2 HIC Latin America

Lorena Zárate stressed the importance of focusing on human rights with regards to Habitat's themes. She highlighted two work items from the HIC Latin America office:

. Housing and mega projects, in rural and urban areas; monitor their social impact, with population displacements and evictions.

. Housing and environment, as for example in the case of climate change and natural disasters like the hurricanes in Cuba. Natural disasters have often served as a pretext for proceeding with the eviction of the poorest populations.

She also presented a project fact sheet on the different social movements, in order to better coordinate a regional training strategy.

The topic of right to the city has a lot of impact; work must continue on it. A major milestone for the year was the new constitution of Ecuador with its inclusion of the right to decent housing and a dignified city.

4.3 HIC Asia

Rabial Mallick explained the distribution of HIC Asia members, especially Bangladesh, Cambodia, Korea, India, the Philippines and Thailand. The topic was the perverse relationship between infrastructure projects and evictions. People are increasingly organizing themselves in recognition of their rights. Although, from a population organization standpoint, the enemy is identified as the local or national government, the danger is global, with the multinationals. However, it is easier to fight at the local level. There is great urgency to unite the regional and global struggles. Asia is very big and diverse; but we are building a front of local and regional organizations under the HIC banner and with the slogan “Act together: housing for all!”

4.4 HIC North America

Nick Volk stated that the particularity of HIC North America is that it is the region with the least amount of affiliated organizations; but they are large networks with millions of activists fighting for the right to housing in the context of inadequate affordable housing. In Canada, the conservative government causes many problems but it is possible to count on the mobilization of many organizations and in particular, HIC membership has increased in this country. There are many problems but there are also many opportunities.

Debate

Joe Schechla. With regards to Gaza, HLRN and its regional partners are working on a methodology similar to the one used during the Lebanon war. Many houses are being destroyed and refugees displaced. Lawsuits against the Israeli government for war crimes will be presented before the International Court of Human Rights with lists of people who gave orders to destroy. There are also litigations against the Zimbabwe government pending; as well as the development of a practice guide for responding to these violations.

Sebastián Oliveira. Fast reaction to massive evictions is essential, as exists in the United States. He stressed that the creation of a methodology to fight against evictions as a result of the crisis is of the utmost importance.

Nick Volk. We are fighting alongside the victims of the crisis; advising mortgage borrowers and intervening or repairing dwellings that can be recovered. Our responsibility, as HIC members, is to mount more solidarity campaigns and directly influence governments.

Félix Yanes. In this context, a collective alliance must be built day by day in Latin America. For this to happen, HIC must establish a clear political approach.

Joe Schechla. A crisis of individual ownership exists; there must be a return to a more collective vision. In reality, the problem of housing is the lack of opportunity to have a different view of individual ownership.

4. Thematic Reports

. HIC HLRN (Housing and Land Rights Network)

Joe Schechla. A methodology and knowledge must be developed on the part of HIC members regarding their work on right to the city and housing and land.

An HIC challenge is to respond to the specific demands of its local and national organizations that denounce housing rights violations. At the same time, the challenge is for the HIC membership to directly participate in the management of the database on housing and land rights violations (VDB, its acronym in English) (with link to VDB).

Furthermore, together with Latin America, we want to share a tool we developed in 2007 for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this context, he reiterated the need for support from the HIC General Secretariat.

With members in Asia, we are developing a guide to monitor banks and their mechanisms for accessing land and housing.

. HIC WAS (Women and Shelter Network)

Graça Xavier. In July 2008, the Women and Shelter Network held a day to discuss and make proposals regarding forced evictions, in which various countries in the UNIFEM program “Safe Cities for Women” participated. There is a proposal for the movements to become more involved in the network and to expand the program to other countries working on issues related to women and land rights.

Shelley Buckingham. The big event of HIC WAS in 2008 was the Barcelona seminar on women and the right to adequate housing which formulated suggestions for a global agenda to pressure governments and international organizations. There are similar initiatives in other parts of the world to the Latin American one mentioned by Graça. The 2008 HIC Francophone Africa strategic plan develops a regional methodology based on experiences from “clínicas de consulta fundària” (a mobile legal service assisting women in the field on issues of access to land and housing). Also in India, there are networks working on issues related to women and access to land. The HIC Secretariat will collect these experiences and proposals in a publication of global interest.

Debate

Anelise Meléndez. During the planning meeting held in Buenos Aires in July 2008, substantial progress was made to integrate the right to housing as a strategic line of work to provide continuation to the work that Graça and I have accomplished in this field. The work advanced on the Right to Safe Cities and cities for all was maintained and fits in line perfectly with HIC’s work on the right to the city.

Joe Schechla. The delivery times of the new HLRN initiatives are: for mid-2009, the practical guide for reacting to evictions; for the end of 2009, in cooperation with several organizations, a guide in Arabic on “participatory budgeting”.

. HIC GS – General Secretariat

Ana Sugranyes. GS is migrating the website www.hic-net.org to a Linux platform. The new website, which will be presented in Cairo, is in response to the creation of HICademy with three service lines: a wiki for specifying housing terminology; all of the Coalition documentation; an online supply and demand system for training, advice and internships.

It is important to remember that HIC is a membership organization. The Coalition recognizes membership, with the right to vote and to be elected, of those organizations that pay their annual dues. At the same time, HIC has a broad social base that, more or less actively, supports and identifies with the Coalition’s strategy.

With regards to this 2009 World Social Forum, the convergence methodology makes it possible to unite criteria among many organizations for: the recognition of the right to the city as part of Objective 6 of the World Social Forum; a democratization of the 2010 World Urban Forum (WUF) in Rio; and the convening of a Popular Urban Forum on the subject of FSM 2011 or the World Assembly of Inhabitants convened by IAI (International Alliance of Inhabitants) (with link to the 2009 WSM Assembly of Assemblies)

5. Political Debate: What is the future of the Coalition?

Félix Yanes. The challenges and opportunities are: i) political education of the grassroots is necessary; ii) in Latin America, there is communication with networks like Alianza Social Continental, ALOP, CEAAL, SELVIP, Vía Campesina with the Charter for land rights; iii) widespread grassroots communication is essential so that all HIC members can participate; iv) the issue of the environment is related to the problem of natural disasters like hurricanes. Tools must be found for the proposals HIC presents in this area.

Debate

Joe Schechla. It is important to make alliances with organizations that work on environmental issues, for example, Vía Campesina. In Cairo, there will be representatives from networks such as Vía Campesina and FIAN.

Anelise Meléndez. There is no communications policy and that is why it is important to have a document that guides and addresses different levels – local, regional and global.

Ana Sugranyes. Great progress was made in francophone Africa not only in Latin America, on the issue of climate change; but documentation and a global voice are still lacking; not only in Latin America.

Sebastián Oliveira. For this political document, it is important to leave room for more networks.

Guillermo Marzioni. There is no political view that helps us reassess everything that has been learned; that is why neoliberal concepts that prevent us from moving towards new proposals must be reviewed.

Marina Thia. It is important to have a political view so that grassroots organizations can participate and take part in the debate. It is these organizations that should receive political education so they can better organize themselves. For this to happen, the debate must be open to all grassroots organizations.

Regina Ferreira. In this crisis situation it is very important to debate, but not only about the financial crisis. It is time for civil society to propose viable alternatives: this is why it is important to create a document jointly with all of the habitat networks. There are two key moments: World Habitat Day and WUF. The challenges ahead are a reflection of the crisis and the need for a concrete proposal for the right to the city.

Evaniza Rodrigues. Better communication is needed so that the HIC contributions to the process of creating networks can be better known.

Roly Escobar. It is important to create a political statement about the crisis now. Furthermore, political projects and training for the population are also necessary. In local practice, participation is a thing of the moment, with no follow up; this occurs for not having invested in the political education of the people confronting the crisis. Therefore, this is truly the moment for doing so.

Ramón Saner. It is difficult to integrate all of the different groups present at the Forum and to build an Alliance, but we have to have an identity and then a unique language so that HIC can contribute regionally and later create a unique document. Global concept clarity is essential.

Allan Cain. Action must be taken against evictions; international solidarity responses must be developed. In Angola, a war waged for many years, there were human rights violations and in particular, housing rights violations with many evictions and destruction of homes.

Lorena Zárate. Two documents should be developed collectively: a mapping of the organizations with whom we work; and a political letter type of document of our approach with respect to the crisis.

Guillermo Marzioni. This document needs to help us to understand why the housing situation of a family has to do with international politics, for example in the case of Gaza and also in the case of the financial crisis. This is a political approach.

Daniel De Souza. There is a need to strengthen our organization while also strengthening this network. The political purpose will emerge from the political situation. We have to define the working tools for the grassroots organizations.

José Luis Paniagua. The work can be articulated in three lines: i) political positioning but not only with respect to the current situation but in the long-run; ii) strategy of strengthening HIC through training at different levels and improving communications; iii) communications document that covers all of HIC's objectives.

Félix Yanes. Strategies for HIC's base must be created from a political conviction and from concrete experiences.

Motion to the Assembly: Designate timeframes and those individuals responsible for working on these documents.

Assembly Decision: The working group is composed of Félix Yanes (Cuba), Evaniza Rodrigues (Brazil), Sebastián Oliveira (Uruguay), Roly Escobar (Argentina), Ramón Saner and Guillermo Marzioni (Argentina). Charlotte Mathivet (HIC-GS) will lend her support in the coordination and translation of this document so it can be ready in May 2009.

6. Closing

The minutes of this first phase of the Assembly will be presented in Cairo, in order to collectively build upon the proposals presented in Belém.

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