

Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting Tunis, 28 March 2013



Participants (see [Annex 1](#) for more details): Adel Al-Soiedi (AA), Ahmed Mansour (AM), Abbas Hassan Rahi Al-Shamari (AR), Ana Sugranyes (AS), Bettina Koehler (BK), Basheer Sakr (BS), Carmen González (CG), Charlotte Mathivet (CM), Claudio Pulgar (CP), Edi Escobar (EE), Emily Mattheisen (EM), Fernando Peralta (FP), Giovanni Allegretti (GA), Gertrud Marczinik (GM), Issa Samander (IS), Jamal Talab Al-Amleh (JA), Joseph Schechla (JS), Katherine Coit (KC), Knut Unger (KU), Lorena Zárata (LZ), Marcelo Waschl (MW), Maria Silvia Emanuelli (SE), Marie Bailloux (MB), Michaela Brück Waschl (MBW), Michael Kane (MK), Muhser Abu Ramadan (MR), Miguel Santibañez (MS), Nelson Saule Jr (NS), Patrick Andrivet (PA), Pascale Thys (PT), Pauline Yao (PY), Rajaa Al-Kassab (RK), Rabie Wahba (RW), Shelley Buckingham (SB), Sheruan Hassan (SH), Saad El Nounou (SN), Sami Slatnia (SS), Vanessa Valiño (VV), Yasser Abdelkader (YA).

Interpreters: Jihene Rihani Chaabane and Samia Ben Romdhane

Minutes taken by Shelley and Marie

1. Welcome

LZ: This meeting is being held during a special moment on a political level, considering the ongoing struggles in this region and around the world. We talk a lot about the crisis and the need for changes at the global level, but most discussions are on a theoretical level. However social movements in this region are demonstrating real actions and are forcing change on the streets. We are not only going through an economic crisis, but a crisis of civilization. Everything has become a commodity and the only way to access things is through money, even though all people hold human rights. Being here for the Land Forum and the World Social Forum has given us spaces to debate these issues. It is also an important moment for us at an institutional level. HIC was formed in 1976 and has been undergoing different changes. We need to undergo some internal changes so that we can work better together. We need to improve democratic practices in the Coalition, and this is the main purpose of the changes that are proposed in the Constitution. We also need to deal with Ana Sugranyes ending her position as General Secretary, and how to proceed in this transition to a new General Secretariat.

RK: The Arab revolutions began in Tunisia, but are unfortunately pending and incomplete and are being held victim to the interests of certain parties which are acting against change now that they are in power.

PY: Whether in Africa or MENA, the difficulties, demands and processes are the same.

2. Quorum

MB: The 39 participants (16 women and 23 men) present for this meeting come from 21 different countries (see the list of participants in [Annex 1](#)). There are [34 members with the right to vote](#), of which 8 are present at this meeting with another 13 who have sent proxies. An additional 4 members have confirmed their participation in the meeting and will arrive later on with the proxies they have received.

LZ: Some Board members have several proxies from other members in their regions because they are in touch with them as their representative.

3. Review and approval of the agenda

LZ: I make a motion to vote for the approval of the General Assembly meeting agenda.

Vote: 21 votes in favour; 0 against; 0 abstentions.

4. Approval of the General Assembly meeting minutes in Naples


CM: I make a motion to vote for the approval of the minutes from Naples.

Vote: 21 votes in favour; 0 against; 0 abstentions.

5. Regional and Thematic Report

MENA / HLRN / SA

- > Housing and land rights
 - > International forums and processes
 - > Land Forum
- > Evictions
 - > Eviction's impact assessment
- > Social production of habitat
 - > Participatory urban planning
 - > Right to the city



JS: We manage the MENA and HLRN programs from the Cairo office and I will also speak about the South Asia regional program. We help members build their capacity for argumentation, analyze housing and land rights, monitor and analyze situations from a human rights framework, develop modules for training, develop tools and find opportunities to apply those tools. We assist members in representing themselves in international forums, for example at the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and in parallel

reporting in Cameroun and Israel. The Land Forum is really defining the MENA regional program, focusing on urban- and land-based struggles. We just concluded another Land Forum here this morning and we had a session on how to continue by developing methodology to do country analysis of land and losses and damages stemming from evictions. The social production of habitat is a constant theme in our work at the regional and international level, and we are currently looking at how to bring the right to the city to the region.

RK: In Morocco, we have been confronted by new situations of the government destroying housing forcing people to leave their homes. We are standing up for these people's rights to water and access to electricity. We have not been successful in our struggles so far, but we hope to receive support in the future.

Europe and North America

- > Housing rights
 - > Spain: advocacy for a new law on mortgages (1,500,000 signatures)
 - > France: advocacy through squatting
 - > US: fighting housing budget cuts affecting the poor
- > Evictions
 - > European mobilization against evictions
 - Solidarity with the PAH (Spain)
 - > Publication on housing rights and the crisis in Europe
 - > Revitalizing European articulation



CM: It has been difficult articulating actions based on the low number of members in Europe and faced with neoliberal austerity policies, few positive effects have resulted. Nevertheless, there are new possibilities for networking that need support, between movements and partners to

address urban issues and the right to housing. We have supported the PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages, Spain) by protesting in front of the Spanish Embassies in Paris, Lisbon, London and Edinburgh and denouncing neoliberal policies and the vicious circle of unemployment and eviction. One concerted action was organized and we hope to organize similar actions in other countries. AITEC (a HIC member) has also produced a [publication on the housing crisis and struggles in Europe](#).

VV: Here is a [video about the PAH](#)

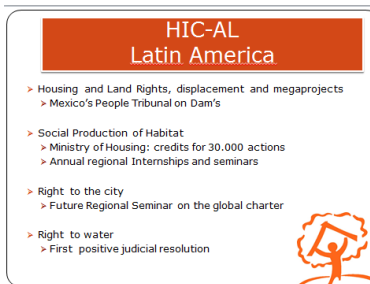
MK: There are also some actions taking place around the mortgage crisis in the US, but so far only at the city level, not the national level. Only 1 of every 4 people who need subsidized housing can access it, and this is related to a budget crisis. The Bush government cut taxes to the rich and expanded the military budget which was never funded through tax increases, so now we have a huge deficit. The Tea Party in Washington wants to cut social programs to balance the budget and so we keep fighting for funding for subsidized housing. In order to protest subsidies, we have formed an alliance with other services for things like services for senior citizens and food stamps. We're also fighting to cut the military budget and end the war in Afghanistan.



Francophone Africa

- > Land Rights
 - > Security of tenure of women's
- > Housing Rights
 - > Advocacy on women's access to social housing
- > Right to water
 - > Training on women's management of water

PY: It was not possible to coordinate activities in the Africa region, so I cannot give a regional report, even though we all work on similar themes; with a special recognition for the CNHA of Burkina Faso. In the Ivory Coast, we have focused our efforts on women's security of tenure. Land is scarce and tenure is very precarious. Urban and forested areas are conflict zones as land is an economic resource. Housing is not built for the poorest people, and we advocate changing governments' policies in this regard.



HIC-AL Latin America

- > Housing and Land Rights, displacement and megaprojects
 - > Mexico's People Tribunal on Dam's
- > Social Production of Habitat
 - > Ministry of Housing: credits for 30,000 actions
 - > Annual regional Internships and seminars
- > Right to the city
 - > Future Regional Seminar on the global charter
- > Right to water
 - > First positive judicial resolution

SE: Members can read about all of our activities in the Member Space, as this is only a brief summary of our activities which have focused on housing and land rights, displacement and megaprojects. A Mexico People's Tribunal was held where Miloon Kothari was one of the judges, and which led us to work with the Supreme Court to write guidelines for megaprojects and ESCR. A seminar was held on the right to the city where social movements came together to speak about their struggles and alternatives. We are now working on having the Mexico City Charter

for the Right to the City recognized in the law. A regional seminar was organized to discuss a regional charter and developing the strategy to formulate an international agenda. Also last year, a judge recognized the right to water for the first time, which led to the obligation of the government to provide the proper infrastructure to allow a water supply to people who did not have it in their homes previously.



General Secretariat

Global International Coalition
Structure Space
Advancements to the HIC Constitution

AS: The Secretariat's activities for 2012 are also available in the Member Space, an online platform which in itself represents one of the biggest projects that we have accomplished in the past 2 years. We worked on some local actions in Chile, like the organization of Raquel

Rolnik's visit, after which the government requested us to develop the introduction to a normative baseline for the right to housing in Chile.

Note: Claudio Pulgar from the Observatorio de Reconstrucción joined the meeting at this point. This changes the quorum to 9 members present with the right to vote, and 13 proxies.

At this time, the debate was opened up for members to share their work.

IS: Through learning about the work being done by the HIC-AL office, I am reminded again of the need to send some experts on the social production of habitat to the MENA region, where corruption and other problems have created a very complicated situation. Perhaps Rajaa could be in charge of coordinating this work between Latin America and MENA. It's important to have an office in Geneva and take up some of the issues that COHRE used to address. We should also begin planning for the upcoming WUF and take advantage of this meeting to develop the basis for a campaign and a central theme to include in the agenda of the next WUF.

SH: Kurdistan is divided between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Many people were forced to leave their areas which divided up the people. Housing is needed to replace villages that were destroyed, and I think the Coalition could shed some light on housing rights. In the revolution taking place in Syria, the military has been destroying homes there too. As the world crisis is spreading, it is even to developed countries like The Netherlands. Housing is a crucial issue there too, as there are plenty of Dutch citizens who have lost their jobs and can't afford to pay for their housing. I am interested to know how the Coalition can address these issues.

MR: The Coalition's activities should be focused on actions that challenge neoliberal policies and on how we can influence the development of social policies and alternative policies that help poor communities. MENA is in crisis with the ongoing transformations, and the new governments are still adopting neoliberal policies. The Coalition should be thinking about solutions and alternatives. We suffer a great deal in Palestine due to the Israeli occupation and the US-based military attacks have caused the destruction of 25,000 homes and public institutions. We need to have a link between urban issues and the right to housing, but we can't do anything if we have no resources.

CP: I am a new HIC member and represent the Observatorio de la Reconstrucción which was founded in 2010 at the University of Chile. The neoliberal economic model implemented in Chile has been copied around the world. We are working with civil society to conduct critical research that is being used to develop proposals for alternatives to present to the state. The 'Andha Chile' is a movement of people indebted with mortgages and is similar to the PAH in Spain. We need to act in a systematic way on a global scale and engage youth in international struggles.

KU: Habitat issues are very closely linked to the financial crisis, and housing is a human right for which we are fighting. We have a double approach in land and housing, and these may be the key to overcoming the crisis. We need to think about our approach on a global level, to think about involving new actors, follow examples like the Indignados and Occupy, and align ourselves with other movements and their approaches. HIC has existed for decades and we need to think about the role of

this aging Coalition. A proposal for the future is to think about the role of housing and land inside the capital accumulation process in a way that leads us to think about alternatives and connect us at the global level.

JS: We're living in a new age, and despite the unfortunate continuing neoliberal issues and occupation, things are happening at the local level. Former dominant parties that were local authorities are in a state of ambiguity or are no longer there. People in informal settlements are perhaps more prepared for change than others. This creates new social formations and new opportunities for work. We've been working with members to develop strategies, techniques for social mobilization, and to get people prepared to assert local plans in the void of local authorities. The office in Delhi is working on guidelines and we're trying to operationalize these principles to provide guidance for local authorities. At the same time, this is a time for global projects and there is a need for sustainability. One example is the work being done in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, and a possible project could be between Brazil, Egypt and Tunis. The future of the Coalition is in the unity of struggles. At the international level, a new initiative began in January of this year in the Human Rights Council, to develop human rights norms for local authorities, which in many ways is linked to the right to the city. There are opportunities to work in Geneva and we are going to work with former COHRE staff to preserve their work on the violations database. Interregional exchanges are really coming of age in this mature Coalition.

Note: Pascale Thys (HeP), Miguel Santibañez (JUNDEP), and Giovanni Allegretto/Bettina Koehler (INURA) joined the meeting at this point, all of whom have the right to vote, therefore changing the quorum to 12 members present with the right to vote. In addition, Pascale brought a proxy from BSHF, making the total proxies 14, and the total number of votes 26.

6. Open debate on HIC achievements and challenges

LZ: Now we will debate on the HIC strategy based on concrete proposals for actions and projects at the regional and international levels.

PT: At Habitat et Participation (HeP, located in Belgium), we are working on a project which collects information on the housing and land situations in each country and displays them on a map, and is mainly focused on urban issues. It is being funded by the Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme with other partners. For more information, please see the [PowerPoint presentation](#) (in French) which details the objectives and gives examples of some cases. The [HeP website](#) also has more information.

NS: There are two initiatives happening right now which present us with possibilities to work together. The first is a process to internationalize the right to the city platform. We began doing this during the first WSF in Porto Alegre, 12 years ago. During the following several WSF, we developed the World Charter for the Right to the City. In Brazil we have been successful at mounting a coalition called the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNUR). Next year in March and May there will be an international forum in Brazil. We have been inviting other organizations to join this process to internationalize the right to the city platform, to discuss a new international urban agenda and to build strategies on how to implement this agenda. We are planning a preparatory meeting in October 2013 with the FNUR. We

are not intending to bring discussions about this international strategy to the WUF, but rather in the years following the WUF.

The other opportunity is around a campaign we are carrying out in Brazil about the social function of land. Our focus is on how we can implement the social use of urban lands in informal settlements, in lands that are unoccupied, in public lands and public buildings. We think that it's possible to work on this together, along with other common struggles like for the right to water.

CM: At AITEC (the International Association of Technical Experts and Researchers) we develop strategies based on citizens' expertise, and provide a bridge between, on the one hand, researchers and specialists, and on the one hand, activists who are closely linked with social movements. Our main achievement last year was the publication of a book on the right to housing and the housing crisis in Europe. We are now in the process of putting a new publication together on the social function of land and property in collaboration with some partners. The publication will be centered around the idea of land as a common good, which is especially relevant in Africa and the demands of indigenous populations as we have witnessed recently with the First Nations peoples of Canada and the *Mapuches* in Chile. Some HIC members (for example, HeP) are part of the team of editors, and Lorena will also provide some political insight. Everyone here is welcome to propose themes for the publication, which we hope will be published in October.

LZ: In relation to some international context and some current issues, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing will be finishing her mandate next year. She has decided to focus on the security of tenure as her final theme. This is important for us because it emphasizes that the right to housing is not the same as the right to private property. The first SRHA report on this theme can be found [on their website](#). It is clear that property rights will not solve housing issues or provide security of tenure. Promoting property rights is the only policy the World Bank has been promoting for the last 30 years.

Another important issue is that there have been specific attacks on housing and new social housing is no longer being provided. These are attacks on cooperatives and collective ownership. This should be one of our main concerns. Two new SRAH reports will be coming out in October and we will have to comment on them. In Naples we listened to the huge differences HIC has with UN-Habitat. We are focused on human rights and they are not. We need to organize around World Habitat Day, the WUF next year in Medellin, Colombia, and Habitat III in 2016. We also need to work with rural populations.

MK: We spoke about disseminating an open letter to UN-Habitat, challenging them about their leadership and promoting a neoliberal model, especially around the upcoming meeting of the Governing Council to be held in Nairobi in April. They are promoting the forced displacement of people, like through their support of the Cairo 2050 Master Plan. We should get some members to form a committee to draft this letter to UN-Habitat.

KU: I would like to support the idea of promoting social rental housing or publicly-controlled housing as an alternative policy. The International Union of Tenants is lobbying at the UN for a new position on affordable rental housing. HIC should put more effort into this topic and talk about what it means. This is related to the project that Pascale presented, as we should be mapping private landlords and social housing.

I'm not sure about the social function of property. I think it has a different meaning in Spanish. This to me just means that property has a function. It doesn't work in English, or at least not in German. I think we should call it the social responsibility of property, to emphasize that property can't be used for anything you want. I think we should talk about the public control and social responsibility of housing and property.

NS: We should see about how to better translate these terms, especially if we are going to build a campaign or platform. I think we are ultimately talking about the same thing. The problem in Brazil is that even when people have housing or land titles, there is a cultural value to land that is not recognized.

KC: We have to be clear about the meaning of these terms. Property in New York or Paris gives an enormous amount of power, but owning a little spot of land in poor communities is essential for their security. It is very important for poor people to own a small bit of land. Regarding cooperatives, they come to mean very different things in different countries. In Holland a cooperative could be of 10,000 units, whereas in Canada it could be only 5. So we have to be careful about the terms we use in relation to what they mean in different parts.

JA: I think these discussions are a bit too detailed, and could have been better to present in the Land Forum. In any case, regarding housing, farming areas are being reduced in size. The role of civil society is to do scientific research.

PY: What I previously mentioned about women is also valid for all the people living in rural areas. When we talk about land as a social good, there is a problem for people who want land but there is no land available. Land that should be used for farming is being grabbed by governments and multi-nationals. We try to produce research and stop the occupation of rural and agricultural areas and also to protect the rural peoples' rights to land, as it is their only source of survival. They need land for economic prosperity. We would like to learn from other countries' experiences on how they are protecting rural peoples' rights to land.

MS: There is an opportunity for global civil society to respond to the MDGs, which is an opportunity that we cannot pass up. We must be engaged in debates led by civil society to advocate for spaces to discuss democracy and development related to the right to the city and housing.

LZ: I would like to propose to set up a working group for the publication that Charlotte is coordinating and another working group to work on World Habitat Day.

CP: Concerning the social function of property and land, I think it is the same interpretation. However there is something wrong when we talk about 'property' and it is assumed that we are talking about 'private property'.

VV: This discussion about the social function of property and land is interesting. If multinationals own half of the city, there should be some limits in place that respect the social function of land and property refers to the limits of property. Another discussion is about where we want to focus our

efforts to have the greatest influence. The UN is important, but I think we should not only concentrate on meetings like the WUF. I think we should also think about targeting other global meetings where very important decisions are made, like the G8/G20.

CM: As a Coalition, I think that when we come to spaces like the WSF, we should hold events like the General Assembly in the actual conference, and not in a separate space.

NS: It is necessary to continue the discussion about the social function of property and land and a working group should work on this, especially towards the preparatory meeting for the conference in Brazil.

CP: We also need to work more on coordinated actions for World Habitat Day. There are actions being done in each region, but nothing is shared on a global scale.

7. HIC Financial Report

AS: The Treasurer must present the financial statements to the General Assembly, however as it is only March, the audits are not currently available. Resources administered by the different HIC structures show similar figures as during the last three years. In 2011, membership contributions have decreased by three quarters from \$4,500 USD in 2011 (at the time of the HIC President election) to \$1,428 in 2012. I would like to request delaying the presentation of the financial statements for 2012 until it is published in the 2012 Annual report. The General Assembly could then review the statements in three months' time. We request you all to contribute to the 2012 Annual Report by sending short articles to the Secretariat.

LZ: The motion is to vote for the approval of this procedure, to delay the approval of the financial statements for three months, until they are published in the Annual Report.

Vote: 23 in favour; 0 against; 0 abstentions

8. Amendments to the HIC Constitution



The final version of the amendments to the Constitution may be found [here](#).

MK: The Constitution was last amended in 1997 and a lot has happened since then. The main objectives of these amendments are to streamline the structure of the Coalition, make it more democratic and more accountable to members, and to engage members in decisions made about the Coalition. This was also a recommendation made by the evaluation. The key vision statement in Article 2 has been clarified and the language has been improved. For the first time, the constitution includes a definition of 'habitat. Article 4.3 now changes the definition of member contributions to include non-monetary contributions as a way to gain full membership. Another set of important changes were made in the composition of the Board, in Article 8 and 9. The composition of the Board has been reduced (from 17 to 11), based more on regional representation and not thematic. Article 14 makes it clear that a

member may receive only one proxy from another member to vote in her/his place. Article 16 and 18 drop the notion of 'Focal Points' and only now only mention 'Reference Centres'. Article 18 redefines 'Committees' as 'Working Groups' and streamlines its definition, making it easier to form and manage working groups. There is now a definition of a quorum for the General Assembly, which is 20% of members representing 10% of the regions.

LZ: These changes are intended to simplify the operations of the Coalition to make it easier to work together. We need to make a motion to approve these changes, but there are a couple of outstanding points that we need to address here.

PT: I think that it is extremely difficult to vote on these changes as we have just seen the document now and do not have time to review it thoroughly before voting. In Belgium, it is necessary to provide 10 days in advance of making these kinds of changes.

LZ: According to the current constitution, the requirement is to give 8 weeks' notice to make amendments. This was done, a blog was set up by the Secretariat accessible through the Member Space, and several notices were made to members to review the proposed amendments online.

NS: In Article 4.3, I propose to include the word 'regional' to "members are those organizations/entities of local, national, or international character".

Also, in Article 8, it mentions only the women's movement, but I think it should include a mention of movements struggling for gender equality and those that are challenging cultural notions of equality. Likewise, "gender equality and diversity" should be added to article 2.3

VV & SB: To this end, we should include "women's and feminist movements" in Article 8.4.

JS: The human rights principle instructs that minorities are groups that need more representation.

RK: We should include a representation of minorities in Article 8.5

MK: Article 8.5 should read "One associated member to be named by the Board, representing discriminated groups and minorities"

LZ: There are 34 members with the right to vote, so we need a minimum of 23 votes to make the required two-thirds majority to approve these amendments. As we did not reach this majority here, we must now open a process for the remaining members with the right to vote, to vote online until April 28.

Those members who have given a proxy to another member present at this General Assembly meeting who abstained from voting on the amendments to the Constitution, will be able to vote on the final version of the amendments. Online voting will be available until 28 April to allow more members to participate.

I make a motion to approve this version of the Constitution including the changes made in this debate, as detailed in these minutes.

Vote: 20 in favour; 0 against; 6 abstentions

Final note: Transition of the General Secretariat

LZ: After 10 years based in Santiago, Chile, the General Secretariat will close its office there in December 2013. Three calls have been made to call for applications, but not candidates have put their names forward. The Board has decided to make a new call for a Secretariat to be established in Cairo, in the HIC-HLRN/MENA office. It is important to give continuity to the Coalition, and this may be aided if the Secretariat is located in a HIC office with operational capacity. Also, it will be helpful to modify some of the Secretariat's functions to be less political as the President and members should assume more of the political functions of the Coalition, and the Secretariat should be more focused on administration, fundraising, managing global projects, membership management, and organizing meetings.

As this is the last meeting organized by Ana and the Secretariat team, we would like to thank Ana in a special way. We all recognize the wonderful work Ana has done and this is why we are here today. We do not say goodbye to Ana, as she will remain in the Coalition, and this is simply the end of the position as the General Secretary.



9. Closure

LZ: We propose to have the next General Assembly meeting in Medellin, Colombia, in April 2014 during the WUF.