

Global Platform for the Right to the City Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad Plateforme Globale pour le Droit à la Ville

## STATEMENT ON UN-HABITAT'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025

UN-Habitat is putting forward a Strategic Plan 2020-2025 with the aim of implementing the New Urban Agenda of Habitat III and embracing the Sustainable Development Goals as the new gold standard for sustainable urban development. The UN agency calls for a paradigm shift and presents itself as the engine to make this change happen.

The Strategic Plan 2020-2025 is right about embracing sustainable urbanization as the cornerstone of the different global agendas. The document also explicitly mentions youth, children, women and girls, older people, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups, including migrants and refugees. This is part of an overall Human Rights based approach that we celebrate, and that we acknowledge was not present in previous drafts.

However, the document is not successful in building the case for a paradigm shift, as it includes several contradictions and **does not address one of the key elements that civil society, local governments and some national governments contributed as part of their "Shared Vision" into the New Urban Agenda: the Right to the City.<sup>1</sup> We understand the Right to the City as the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, transform, govern and enjoy cities, towns and human settlements that are just, inclusive, safe, sustainable and democratic, defined as common goods for enjoying life with dignity and peace. The term "Right to the City" is not mentioned anywhere in the document, and its components are generally absent or weak in the overall narrative.** 

The Right to the City reminds us of the importance of cities and humans settlements free of discrimination; gender-responsive and with inclusive citizenship, that embrace minorities and ethnic, racial, sexual, cultural and functional diversity; with enhanced political participation; that fulfill its social function, with quality of public space, diverse and inclusive economies, and inclusive rural-urban linkages. A city/human settlement of gender equality cannot be accomplished without addressing safe, inclusive, accessible and affordable housing, transportation, public spaces and public services for women and girls, access to employment and economic empowerment. In order to guarantee that any and all of these criteria are met, it is absolutely vital that women are involved in urban planning, local governance and decision-making processes related to their urban environments.

Although the Plan uses the terms "sustainable urbanization" and "sustainable (urban) development", these are not defined as such. In addition, **we know sustainable urbanization is not enough**. In the context of growing un-democratic, corporate and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Article 11 of the New Urban Agenda - <u>http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf</u>



authoritarian regimes, criminalization of social movements and brutal attacks on human rights defenders, we need to advocate for participatory democratic models that address the governance challenges we are facing. We are shocked to realize that "local democracy" and "metropolitan governance" are only mentioned once in the whole document.

There is no mention of the social function of land, property and the city, nor to the so-called informal economy and the need to recognize and support its fundamental contributions; and only two mentions of cooperatives, all of which are key elements to building an alternative development paradigm. With regards to informality, the Strategic Plan fails to acknowledge the relevance of tackling informality in a dedicated topic on Part 2. Given that the world is increasingly going informal this topic deserves to be addressed more thoroughly. Housing and Land Property Rights should be seen within the context of the Housing Rights approach, including specific mention to individual and collective, traditional and state-based forms of tenure other than private property.

Regarding UN-Habitat's new organizational scheme, we do not see a clear model for engaging civil society groups, especially those that cannot easily participate in international gatherings due to a lack of resources or capabilities. We perceive a **tension between the need to diversify funding sources and accountability to member states**, which would need clear guidelines for receiving funds from private donors and should not lead the Agency to compete with civil society organizations for funding.

The Right to the City brings a new and necessary perspective for the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, among others. Over the last decades, the Right to the City has been a viable alternative and a claim with which to respond to some of the most pressing challenges of our time: social injustice, inequality, exclusion, dispossession, spatial segregation, discrimination of all kinds, destruction and privatization of the commons and environmental degradation. The Right to the City brings a human rights perspective and allows for the fulfillment of economic, social and cultural rights in each specific territory.

We launch an urgent appeal to UN-Habitat to be consistent with previous commitments and the shared vision included in the New Urban Agenda and embrace the Right to the City as a collective path to implement the New Urban Agenda and 2030 Agenda to build just, inclusive, democratic, peaceful and sustainable cities and human settlements for all.