



## Global Platform for the Right to the City Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad Plataforma Global pelo Direito à Cidade

### Call for the Inclusion of the Right to the City in the Habitat III Agenda

31 July 2015

The **Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C)** aims to advocate for fair, democratic, sustainable and inclusive cities. Such principles can also be translated into commitments, policies, projects and concrete actions adopted by United Nations bodies and national and local governments. The Members of the GPR2C strongly believe that the process of developing a New Urban Agenda must take a human rights approach, with the Right to the City as its cornerstone. Therefore, we call for the inclusion of the Right to the City as the main guideline for all documents and debates set during the preparation process towards the Habitat III Conference. In this sense, we express our concerns about the fact that there is no mention whatsoever of The Right to the City in any of the 22 issue papers<sup>1</sup>, even though the title of one of the Policy Units suggests that this concept would be part of them.

#### *The legacy of Habitat II and growing challenges*

During the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II, Istanbul, 1996) the participating States adopted commitments and a global plan of action that included, among other issues, adequate shelter for all, sustainable human settlements, enablement and participation, gender equality, financing shelter and human settlements, and international cooperation and assessment of the progress. The Habitat II Resolution reaffirmed governments' obligation to uphold the right to adequate housing, protecting residents from eviction or redressing it, and combating homelessness.

Despite those commitments, the Habitat situation has dramatically worsened during the last two decades. The commodification of land and the speculation on housing based on unregulated credits even generated massive evictions and resulted in a world economic crisis, with increasing numbers of empty housing stock and homelessness at the same time. Development policies based on the attractiveness of private investments and the competitiveness between cities have had a terrible impact on the social fabric worldwide, where disparities are more acute and multidimensional poverty is continually growing, especially but not only in the Global South. It is estimated that 863 million people are living in slum-like conditions, 90% of them in developing countries, without minimum standards of dignity and rights (UN Habitat, 2013).

Since Habitat II, new and growing challenges and issues apply to human settlements development and deserve to be fully included into the New Habitat Agenda. The various Habitat III preparations, reporting and deliberation processes and contents must be grounded in (1) a faithful evaluation of commitments made at Habitat II; (2) a review of housing-rights and good-governance practices consistent with those essential aspects of the Habitat II promise<sup>2</sup>, while taking into consideration the lessons learned and greater conceptual clarity of the issues since Habitat II; and (3) a realistic preparation for the emerging human settlement-development challenges that light the way towards improving "balanced rural and urban development," as pledged since Habitat I (1976)<sup>3</sup>.

#### *The need for the Right to the City*

In this sense, the GPR2C (<http://www.right2city.org/>) recalls the importance to recognize the Right to the City in the New Urban Agenda, as an individual and collective right for all inhabitants, considering the territories of the cities and their hinterlands as spaces for the exercise and fulfilment of human rights, in order to ensure that people have access to the resources, services, goods and opportunities that the city brings in a fair, universal, democratic and sustainable way. The World Charter for the Right to the City<sup>4</sup> defines this right "as the equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, and social justice. It is the collective right of the inhabitants of cities, in particular of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, that confers upon them legitimacy of action and

organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to free self-determination and an adequate standard of living". It is a right that confers legitimacy upon people's action and organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to an adequate standard of living. Like all human rights, the Right to the City is interdependent of all internationally recognized and integrally conceived human rights. That is why it has interface with civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, bringing the dimensions of the territory and the urban life.

The right to the city as a collective right is not restricted to the respect, protection and to ensure individual human rights at the local level. It reflects a territorial, integral and complex human rights concept already legislated (and corresponding to obligations of the authorities in their different Government levels). On the other hand, it offers an "umbrella" to integrate new rights not yet recognized, that is to say, "emerging collective rights" (water, urban land, energy, transport, public space, memory and cultural and ethnic identity etc.).

#### *Lines of the Global Platform to develop the Right to the City*

The respect, protection, promotion and implementation of the Right to the City are crucial to promote a shift in the current urban development paradigm. Therefore, the urban development process must be based on the following guiding principles:

- The full exercise of citizenship, respecting and protecting human rights for all;
- The respect and fulfilment of the social function of land and property;
- The democratic management of the territory;
- The right to socially produce the habitat and economy for citizen's life; assuring the rights of informal workers;
- The responsible and sustainable management of common (natural, energy, historic and cultural) assets; and
- The equal enjoyment of public spaces and community facilities.

The Right to the City implementation also requires a framework for the decentralization of public administration (office, technical ability, resources) and an active role of local authorities, ensuring them democratic and participatory mechanisms in decision-making processes.

Having in mind these principles, the implementation of the Right to the City demands actions in four thematic axes, in which the GPR2C analysis and proposals are organized: Human Rights in the Cities; Democratic and Participatory Governance in the Cities; Urbanization, Sustainable Use of the Territory and Social Inclusion; and Economic Development and Social Inclusion in Cities<sup>5</sup>.

Through the first one, Human Rights in the Cities, we recall the importance to bear in mind that the Right to the City is interdependent of all internationally recognized and integrally conceived human rights, and therefore includes all the existing civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, highlighting the need to ensure: non-discrimination and protection of vulnerable groups; access to public services and public works; promotion of safe cities; access to justice and legal remedies, among others.

The second axis, Democratic and Participatory Governance in the Cities, states the need for local governments and local authorities to develop and implement different tools to integrate citizen participation in decision-making processes. In order to have public policies corresponding to population's needs and aspirations, it is essential that local public authorities assure institutionalized spaces that facilitate citizens' participation in public administration. This participation should be wide, direct, equitable and democratic. Citizens should be included and consulted in all stages of the decision-making process: planning, preparation, approval, investment decisions, project management and implementation, and evaluation. Governments must also ensure transparency and access to information to the population in order to facilitate monitoring and accountability. They must also take into account a growing civil society participation (formal or informal) in territory management. It is also necessary to have inter-municipal cooperation models and forms of cooperation between different levels of government (municipal, state and national government), all of them entirely open to citizen participation.

Our third axis, Urbanization, Sustainable Use of the Territory and Social Inclusion, urges cities to solidify a new paradigm of integrated planning and management of urban development that fosters the promotion of diversified uses in the same territory. To become increasingly inclusive, secure, resilient and sustainable, cities should regulate urban development through territorial policies that ensure the fulfilment of the social function of public and private property in compliance with the social, cultural and environmental collective interests over individual interests. Additionally, the expansion of cities should occur in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, whereby housing enterprises or economic developments are integrated and not isolated. There is a need to maximize the potential of the real city, which should be reinvented and rethought based on its cultural and environmental heritage and according with social demands, which should guide mobility and services network planning. It must ensure the right of all individuals and social groups to all services and urban public goods that the city can offer. Cities' planning and administration must also ensure equal rights for all and access to basic and social services, adequate housing, public spaces, green spaces and the preservation and sustainable enjoyment of natural and cultural heritage.

Through the fourth axis, Economic Development and Social Inclusion in Cities, we focus on the challenges and perspectives of the so called informal economy in the cities. It must be noted that a significant part of the population is involved in the informal economy; has no rights; and remain somehow invisible for governments and public policies. At the same time, the informal economy workers are frequently the object and main targets of privatization and revitalization policies (in other words, gentrification, in the majority of the cases), which are detrimental to realization of the Right to the City. The informal economy is also part of the physical informality of the city (housing, access to basic services, etc.). It is necessary to bring these two issues together for discussion. While it is important to recognize the need for “negotiating” the occupation of public space by workers on the streets—so that the rights and needs of all of those who make use of the urban public space are met—it is important to recognize that streets are the primary and most-essential component of the public sphere, where a great deal of the informal economy workers (particularly for waste pickers and street vendors) make their livelihood. Assuring the rights of informal workers assures realization of the Right to the City.

Given that all citizens have the right to participate in the use of the urban territory within democratic parameters, with social justice and within sustainable environmental conditions (World Charter for the Right to the City, 2005, p. 3), cities should encourage an urban expansion guided by collective interests, thus creating the potential for socio-environmental sustainability and the equal access to the use of the urban land. Therefore, cities should adopt norms for just distribution of burdens and benefits generated by the urbanization process and adjust economic, tributary and financial policy instruments, as well as public spending policies to the objectives of equitable and sustainable urban development. In addition, the extraordinary income (surplus) generated by public investment should be redirected in favour of social programs that guarantee the equitable access to land, the right to housing and to a dignified life for the population living in precarious conditions and risk-prone areas, and the sustainable development of small urban centres according to a social, environmental and urban point of view.

### *Call for the inclusion of the R2C in the general agenda*

In this regard, we - social movements, non-governmental organizations, networks and forums, academic institutions, public sector, foundations and international organizations- members of the Global Platform for the Right to the City, call for the inclusion of the Right to the City in the New Urban Agenda that will emerge from the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) as a transformative way of urban development for fair, democratic, sustainable and inclusive cities.



## **Global Platform for the Right to the City**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Issue Paper 3 "Safer Cities" which briefly mentions The Right to the City. Downloadable at: <https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/knowledge>

<sup>2</sup> Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements [Istanbul Declaration] and the Habitat Agenda, 14 June 1996. Downloadable at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G96/025/00/PDF/G9602500.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>3</sup> Habitat International Coalition's Primer on the Indispensable Process and Content of Habitat III (2016). Downloadable at [http://hic-gs.org/content/Habitat\\_III\\_BasHICs\\_brief\\_final.pdf](http://hic-gs.org/content/Habitat_III_BasHICs_brief_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> World charter for the Right to the City, 27 June 2005. Downloadable at <http://www.hic-gs.org/news.php?pid=2422>

<sup>5</sup> The GPR2C has issued a number of documents including the "Guiding Document: action plan and thematic axes". Downloadable at <http://www.right2city.org/publicacoes/>