



**OUR RIGHTS
OUR FREEDOMS
ALWAYS**
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2015



Habitat International Coalition Declaration on the occasion of the Human Rights Day 2015

At Paris, 67 years ago today, UN Member states affirmed that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” That 1st article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enshrined this fundamental human rights principle with seeming prescience of its contemporary relevance. In light of the various currents and trends today impeding implementation of that principle, as civil actors around the globe, we reaffirm that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

However, thwarting efforts toward sustainable human well-being are growing inequality, land and resource accumulation by dispossession and the systematic violation of human rights that persist with impunity and, often, complicity of the very states that all have committed to implementing these customary norms.

The realization that we are all one is becoming clearer and more urgent in the light of a human-made environmental disaster that looms, even as UN Member states convene again at Paris in COP21 to confront the other epic challenge of climate change. Those decision makers must muster the courage to address and resolve root causes.

This was also the year for states to approve the Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality. These essential goals are indivisible and integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. It remains to be seen if states will muster the necessary political will to address global discrimination and poverty substantively and, thus, to discharge their treaty-bound individual and collective obligations to do so. In the meantime, combating discrimination and poverty remains mainly a local task that we pledge to uphold, despite the complacency of officials and political leaderships and the global discussions and subsequent agendas overemphasize the economic dimension of their responsibilities and commitments. Much time is dedicated to wording and few resources are available to eradicate poverty, discrimination and address cause roots of human made disasters and climate change.

As we advance toward Habitat III (HIII), the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016, we observe with serious concern how HIII's content and process have abandoned the human rights approach and the much needed rural-urban balanced development for all human beings, and have shifted to an urbanization and growth patterns that have already demonstrated their inability to address the fundamental issues affecting habitat rights. Needless to say, the cause of this growing inequality is precisely this growth and urbanization trend, the subsequent accumulation of wealth and inadequate mechanisms of redistribution and the absence of mechanisms to ensure poverty alleviation. Problems cannot be solved exacerbating their root causes while combining this time discrimination with advancing climate change, as it causes greater displacement, endless urbanization and creation of apartheid cities, and generates more land and weather disasters in every region.

Individuals and communities across the world remain vulnerable to persistent discrimination that denies and violates their human right to adequate housing (HRAH) and related rights—including, *inter alia*, the rights to land, food, water, health, participation and decent work—essential for sustenance and survival. Discrimination and its ideologies often euphemize market-driven economics, destructive projects, patriarchy, opportunistic investment and inequitable urbanization, which variously combine to devastate communities and their environments. Discrimination and its rationale manifest in forced eviction of impoverished city dwellers; denial of pastoral communities' access to vital natural resources; usurpation of farmers' and peasants' lands; failure to implement agrarian reform and invest sufficiently in rural development; denial of women's rights to housing, land, inheritance and property; displacement and replacement of indigenous peoples; further marginalization of minorities; systematic exclusion of communities on grounds of their descent and work; wanton destruction in the context of conflict, occupation and war; and the dispossession of people and entire nations under occupation and comparable forms of alien domination and violence.

Contemporary forms of discrimination have joined an array of historical factors that lead to violations of housing and land rights: exclusionary development paradigms; denial of secure tenure; lack of legal recognition of collective rights to land and other natural resources; declining public housing assistance; restricted access to credit; growth of land mafias and

cartels; privatization of basic services; predatory and “sub-prime” mortgage lending; differentiated “nationality” vs. “citizenship” rights; barriers to effective participation; and a lack of effective legal protection against discrimination by private and public actors. A dominant “ethos of privatism” in economic life increasingly subjects access to adequate housing and land to income competition that generates new forms of discrimination. This is unacceptable, particularly in light of the state’s obligation to respect, protect and fulfill HRAH.

On the other hand, we observe how the global agendas are limiting the participation of CS actors. The participation in the drafting of the Habitat II Agenda was more ample than permitted in current Habitat III. The diversity of views—including mention of standing commitments—are not allowed, particularly those that highlight and/or challenge the narrowing of the Habitat Agenda and inclusive concept (three times affirmed (1976, 1996 and 2001). You will hear no mention of these antecedents from UN-Habitat/Habitat III Secretariat officers or their followers. One must accede to UN Habitat’s amnesiac guidance by pledging allegiance to the replacement new “urban” agenda.

This period should enable sufficient freedom of expression to consider even reforming UN-Habitat to operate coherently with the UN Chartered three purposeful dimensions (pillars): peace and security, forward development and human rights, girded by means of international cooperation. In 1948, UDHR also acknowledged that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.” It also proclaimed “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want...as the highest aspiration of the common people.”

On this Human Rights Day, Habitat International Coalition (HIC) echoes the call for “equal rights of men and women and...to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” Likewise, we also must sound an alarm at the unrelenting pattern of housing and land rights violations that indicates rampant discrimination in every region, and the need to uphold the pre-emptive and remedial human rights approach in the Habitat III process and beyond.

For more information on the work of HIC, visit: <http://www.hic-gs.org/>, <http://hlrn.org/>, www.hlrn.org.in/, <http://www.hic-mena.org> and www.hic-al.org/

For more information on the Human Rights Day 2015, visit: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/HRDay2015/Pages/HRD2015.aspx>

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