

Statement of the German Forum on Environment & Development on Habitat III

The German **Forum on Environment & Development** was founded in 1992 after the UN conference in Rio on environment and development. Its purpose is to coordinate German NGOs in international political processes on sustainable development. It was strongly involved in the preparation and the civil society processes of the Habitat III Conference in 1996 in Istanbul. The Forum is closely linked to environmental and developmental organizations in Europe and is aiming at a change of the current wasteful economy and lifestyle of industrial countries.

We welcome ...

- ... the organization of a further global Habitat conference of United Nations, because it may help to remind governments and societies to keep their Habitat II promises by realizing the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable urban settlements in our urbanizing world.
- ... the interest to actualize and concretize the urban dimensions of the post-2015 development goals.
- ... the opportunity for a critical review of the 1996 Habitat Agenda, for a global reflection on the reasons of its (non)implementation and for a shared analysis of new challenges and forces towards just and liveable cities for all.
- ... the many ideas and views already expressed in 22 draft issue papers presented in six policy areas, because this productivity may encourage urban social movements across the world to raise their own voices and propose their own goals, visions and proposals for a sustainable development of settlements aiming to defend and realize human rights, justice and equality.

From our point of view, there are some missing points in the papers and debates:

We miss ...

- ...a clear commitment to the achieved agreements on main goals of the 1996 Habitat Agenda, especially the commitment to the realization of the right to adequate shelter and to equitable human settlements as principles of sustainable development.
- ... a serious reference to the practice of forced evictions and the destruction of people's settlements. These inhuman practices increasingly impact millions of people in African and Asian cities, and are strongly present in other continents, including Europe and North America. Forced evictions are serious violations of Human Rights and a constant threat for all inhabitants of self-built settlements as well as for low-income tenants.
- ... policy proposals to stop and revert growing social inequalities which are the main reasons for urban poverty and social exclusion, for autocratic governance and insecurity, for unsustainable urban growth and transformations, for real estate speculation and economic instability.
- ... specific attention on gender discrimination as well as on the exclusion of disabled, elderly and other groups. All these problems need specific approaches and should not be mixed under one umbrella of "inclusion".
- ... a reference to the negative role of austerity policies (for instance as elements of structural adjustment policies) imposed on many countries and cities by governments, international agencies, supranational institutions and international treaties, which substantially reduced the provision of decent housing and other basic services and had an extremely negative impact on equity and liveability of human settlements.
- ... the issues of privatization and deregulation of social and public rental housing and its consequences on exclusion and the access to housing.
- ... a critical review of impacts of public private partnership (PPP) agreements – as recommended at Habitat II – and of the privatisation of essential public services like water, transport and electricity on service quality, costs, municipal finances and the living conditions of citizens, specifically those with lower income.
- ... an adequate reflection on the disastrous consequences of subprime lending, mortgage securitisation and private equity or hedge funds on housing and land markets. The 2008 crisis showed to which extent that can dramatically influence the security of tenure of millions, private and public debt, urban economy, employment, and municipal finances.
- ... reporting on the consequences and risks of existing and planned international free trade agreements (like TTIP) on housing and cities.

We have serious concern ...

- ... that Habitat III might forget many of the international agreements on a human rights orientated urban development, on equitable human settlements, on local participation and social sustainability which had been achieved at Habitat II, and that Human Rights obligations of governments might be neglected and substituted by technocratic approaches to reshape the cities for future challenges, middle class needs and business opportunities.
- ... that the "New Urban Agenda" could put a strong focus on the restructuring of cities in view of climate changes, but might not seek sufficiently for solutions which combine that focus with the big social and economic questions like poverty and inequality, homelessness and insecurity of tenure, discrimination and social exclusion, expropriation and expulsion.
- ... that climate adaption could become a pretext for anti-social legislations, urban transformations and profitable business strategies.
- ... that elements of the New Urban Agenda arguing for the need of restructuring the cities for climate adaptation might be misused by governments to justify evictions.
- ... the world community will fail to discuss the urban roots of the 2007 ff. crashes and will do nothing to correct the destructive path of commodification, privatisation and deregulation of our urban commons, of land, housing and infrastructure.
- ... that public and social housing, social control of urban land use and the public provision of basic services – measures which could reduce the growing social inequalities in cities and societies – will not play a serious role at Habitat III.
- ... that "inclusion" and cohesion without presenting instruments and policies on how to substantially reduce social inequalities will remain symbolic.
- ...that the reality of urban poverty could be merged and forgotten under the *inclusion* umbrella.

We propose that the Habitat III conference in its final declaration ...

- ... takes up the legacy of the Habitat Agenda and reaffirms the importance of the Right to Housing, as it is put down in the International Covenant on ESC Rights from 1966, including all aspects as "*security of tenure; availability of services and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility, especially for disadvantaged groups; adequate location and cultural adequacy.*" States are obliged to protect, respect and fulfil this right with appropriate state budgets (or development funds) sufficient to address urgent housing problems. A thorough survey of the housing situation of all population groups is required as well as the participative development of short and long term strategies for overcoming specific housing deficits.
- ... confirms that sustainable urban development is an approach towards the realization of human rights, equity and justice; that it depends on the active participation of all inhabitants and cannot be achieved without seriously addressing the reality of lower income citizens.
- ... clarifies that technical solutions for urban resilience and smart cities can never replace the holistic approach of sustainable development and social human rights and that the adaption of cities to climate change shall never serve as a pretext for anti-social urban developments,
- ... includes a clear statement in favour of the urgent need to democratically control the use of urban land and to provide sufficient land for social housing purposes in city centres, close to job opportunities and to social, cultural and recreational facilities.
- ... discusses the options of democratically organized public and social housing models at broad scale – including rental, cooperative and collective tenure – as a fundamental instrument of a rights based housing provision for all, defining production pattern, management models, funding needs and roles of state, cities and civil society in that social production of habitat.
- ... includes in its discussions the necessity to regulate mortgage, real estate investments and financial industries.
- ... considers the need to overcome the austerity dogma and to allow social and poverty oriented public investment strategies in housing, services and infrastructure.
- ...reviews the impact of free trade and workfare on cities.
- ... recognizes the big number of tenants in most kinds of settlements, including informal settlements, and supports measures to improve their legal security of tenancy.
- ... questions the idea that private property deeds are always the best solution and strengthens the development of alternatives – also in regard to the regularisation of informal settlements.
- ... sends a strong worldwide signal condemning the inhuman practice of forced evictions as a serious violation of Human Rights.