



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



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Walk the talk: a complete realization of the NUA commitments for structural change

Collective statement for the second UN-Habitat Assembly

Civil society and local government organizations call on UN Member States and UN-Habitat to act on their commitment to “achieve cities and human settlements in which all people can enjoy equal rights and opportunities.”¹ For this, an accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) is called for, in particular, implementing commitments that still are far from being fulfilled, such as the social and ecological function of land and human settlements, supporting the social production of habitat, as well as social, solidarity, informal and care economy, advancing participatory governance toward the democratic management of cities and territories and progressively respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights obligations in the urban and rural context, in particular in regards to protecting and fulfilling women's equal rights.

For such, States attending the UN-Habitat Assembly, as well as the agency in itself, are called upon to create mechanisms that channel the actions and solutions being led by civil society, community organizations and local and regional governments as key stakeholders in the effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NUA commitments.

We agree with the content of the UN Secretary General's (2022)² and the UN-Habitat Executive Director's (2023)³ reports that acknowledge a worsening of global crises such as the climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing inequalities that have reached unprecedented levels, limiting the progress on the commitments stated in the NUA and the 2030 Agenda. While the reports underscore the importance of NUA commitments in driving the response to these multiple, cyclical crises and preventing new ones, neither question urban development models that have been supported until now, setting urban growth as an irreversible phenomenon⁴ and not questioning hegemonic notions related to “development” and “growth” under which such models rely on. **It is urgent to change dominant models of economic development - that increasingly tend toward financialisation and commodification of essential social services and goods, such as housing, energy and water provision, among others - toward alternative approaches that put people and nature at the center.**

Toward this end, we celebrate the recognition of the importance of public and common goods and the institutions that deliver them in the 2022 UN-SG Report, as well as the assessment that the response to the COVID-19 crisis has opened the path for **courageous initiatives and policies, based on the protection of rights under a redistributive framework that prioritizes care and the collective common good over profits.** Examples cited include the re-municipalization of service provision to ensure access for all to basic services such as water, electricity or waste management or the implementation of concrete actions to end homelessness⁵, prevent and combat forced evictions⁶ and promote affordable housing, rooted on a commitment to revert the commodification of housing, through actions such as taxing empty units, regulating the construction and rental markets, promoting housing cooperatives and others. Community land trusts⁷ should figure prominently in the solutions.

¹ New Urban Agenda, paragraph 12

² The Quadrennial Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, 2022

³ Progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda - Report of the UN-Habitat Executive Director, 2023

⁴ This is also evoked in the draft resolution on ‘slums’, in which the expansion of informal settlements is attributed mostly to population growth, without acknowledging how economic and territorial development trends create patterns of expulsions and displacements that directly feed into the growth of informal settlements;

⁵ The SG report draws on the recommendations made by the UN General Assembly Third Committee on a 2021 report on “Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)”, citing the need to encourage “Member States to increase the pool of affordable housing with social supports, particularly in urban areas, upgrade slums and take steps to end arbitrary evictions and the commodification of housing”.

⁶ New Urban Agenda, paragraph 31, 107, 111

⁷ New Urban Agenda, paragraph 107



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Far from being novel or emerging from responses to the pandemic, these approaches are rooted in the [overall vision and core commitments of the New Urban Agenda](#) and provide the needed specificity for advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goal 11⁸. Thus, as emphasized by the [Global Platform for the Right to the City](#), [Habitat International Coalition](#) and partner organizations at the 2022 High Level Meeting on the progress of NUA implementation, **we call for UN-Habitat and member States to consider NUA commitments when forging a programme of action on key thematic areas such as the human right to housing, public service provision, care, food sovereignty, climate justice and sustainable and fair economic development.**

In the face of current crises, we highlight **six principles** to guide the advancement of NUA commitments:

1. Fulfilling the social and ecological function of land and human settlements⁹ by reinforcing rural-urban linkages and prioritizing collective social, economic and environmental interests and just housing and local and territorial food systems over individual and neo-liberal forms. This represents a key step in countering the rise of inequalities and degradation of the planet caused by unsustainable economic development and urbanization. It means opening the path to stronger regulation over essential goods such as housing,¹⁰ basic services and natural resources, stopping practices that violate human rights, such as forced evictions, as well as exploring arrangements for managing those beyond the public/private divide¹¹;

2. Ensuring that the participatory principles and practices of social and solidarity economy (SSE)¹² are mainstreamed, following the recognition by the UN General Assembly¹³ on the importance of the SSE in providing pathways for economic development that are more equitable, fair and committed to the sustainable development of territories. This should be done also through the support of popular-economy initiatives, by recognizing the role of informal workers to city systems and economies, as well as the care economy. Both are under-represented and under-recognized amid increasing trends toward corporate capture of decision making, including and especially across the UN. Moreover, practices of self-management need to be supported in the fields of housing, service provision, food sovereignty, social protection and others, integrating them under initiatives such as the proposed “Global Action Plan for transforming informal settlements and slums”, which does not take into account efforts from the SSE;

3. Committing to participatory principles and practices,¹⁴ progressing towards democratic management of cities and territories. While the reports on NUA implementation highlight the need for multi-sphere governance and participation, an assessment is still needed of current aggravation of democratic conditions in multiple countries, with the rise of authoritarian/autocratic and neo-liberal governments that violate human rights and corresponding obligations applicable to *all* organs of the state. At the same time, through the municipalist movement, the local government sphere has been a burgeoning field for developing more-participatory governance models. This also involves advancing on decentralization, with the necessary competencies and resources, to ensure that multiple spheres of governments fulfill the rights of inhabitants, through mechanisms of effective participation and **bottom-up planning and management, supporting the human rights-based priorities and practices, especially**

⁸ Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and other Goals and Targets related to land, gender equality and ending poverty,

⁹ New Urban Agenda paragraph 13a cited cities and human settlements that “Fulfill their social function, including the social and ecological function of land, with a view to progressively achieving the full realization of the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living”. The ecological and social function of land is also cited on paragraph 69, under a commitment to “preserving and promoting the ecological and social function of land, including coastal areas that support cities and human settlements, and to fostering ecosystem based solutions to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, so that the ecosystem’s regenerative capacity is not exceeded”.

¹⁰ On paragraph 111, the NUA commits to the “development of adequate and enforceable regulations in the housing sector, including resilient building codes, standards, development permits, land use by-laws and ordinances, and planning regulations, combating and preventing speculation, displacement, homelessness and arbitrary forced evictions and ensuring sustainability, quality, affordability, health, safety, accessibility, energy and resource efficiency, and resilience”.

¹¹ Mechanisms for surpassing such a divide under a “commoning” approach are further described on the “(Global) Commons Policy Paper” released in 2022 by GPR2C and UCLG., available at: <https://www.right2city.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/TP-COMMONS-FINAL.pdf>

¹² Recognized in the NUA paragraph 58, noting the importance to support local business and enterprises operating in both the formal and informal economies.

¹³ UN General Assembly, “Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development”, Seventy-seventh session, Agenda item 18, 2023

¹⁴ Participation and inclusionary decision-making is cited multiple times in the NUA, such as in paragraphs 9, 13, 14, 16, 26, 31, 33, 38-39, 41, 48, 61, 72, 81, 86, 91-92, 97, 105, 114, 119, 125, 138-140, 148, 155-156. See also Sherry Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (July 1969), pp. 216–24, <https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/?print=pdf>.



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respecting the rights of women, the poor, minorities and marginalized groups, Indigenous peoples, afro-descendent and other racialized communities, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ people, children and youth, people with disabilities and older persons, and the organizations supporting them. UN-habitat and member states can operationalise the proposed "Global Action Plan (GAP) for transforming informal settlements and slums" as a lever for advancing community initiatives through participatory neighborhood improvement, social production of habitat and mechanisms based on residents' initiatives and demands¹⁵.

4. Combatting, preventing and remedying forced evictions as a gross violation of human rights, in particular, the human right to adequate housing.¹⁶ While this is an obligation of all organs of States under international law, it is proven that forced evictions deepen poverty and deprivation, constituting a gross violation of human rights, entitling victims and affected persons to full reparations.¹⁷ These norms are indispensable to NUA implementation and must be included in UN Habitat's Global Urban Monitoring Framework (GUMF).

5. Support for the social production of habitat¹⁸. The social production and management of habitat involves all processes that generate habitable spaces, urban components and homes that are carried out under the control of self-producers and other not-for-profit social agents in rural and urban areas. Such processes can originate in families, individuals acting in organized informal groups, in social enterprises such as cooperatives, or in NGOs, among others. The self-managed variants range from the spontaneous individual self-production of housing to collective initiatives to realize the human need and human right to an adequate home and community to live in peace and dignity through often-complex processes of production and management of multiple components of the habitat. These processes enable the realization of the human right to housing by those who cannot access the market, credit or subsidies.¹⁹ The NUA commitment clearly binds spheres of government to support these processes in various ways, including through their recognition in national legislation, technical assistance and facilitating environmentally sound, climate-appropriate and affordable inputs, among other practical measures.

6. Respecting, protecting and fulfilling women's equal rights and their right to the city²⁰ in a human rights habitat. Achieving gender equality requires the exercise of women's rights and codification in international law as an absolute minimum. This requires effective measures and actions by all spheres of government as a matter of binding obligation, as well as corresponding actions by other stakeholders. The rights-based approach complements and reaches beyond the commitment to "empower all women and girls by ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal rights in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision making, by ensuring decent work and equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value, for all women and by preventing and eliminating all forms of discrimination, violence and harassment against women and girls in private and public spaces"²¹. With respect to governments' NUA commitment to "take measures to promote women's full and effective participation and equal rights in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision making, including in local governments."²² These measures of equality include those regarding equitable and sustainable access to, use of, and control over land and other productive resources. This is a matter of inalienable human rights, quite apart from levels of "empowerment", and should seek to prioritize the realization and enjoyment of these rights beyond notions of "empowerment".

¹⁵ Draft resolution for the UN-Habitat Assembly "Accelerating Transformation of Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030". Such a resolution is welcomed by community organizations and networks working on this field, but urging UN-Habitat and its members to improve the dialogue and connection with initiatives and demands being articulated by residents and community-led organizations such as the "[Our neighbourhoods, our rights, our cities](http://www.hlm.org/ima/documents/ECN4199377%20en.pdf)" campaign

¹⁶ Commission on Human Rights, "forced eviction," resolution 1993/77, 10 March 1993, para. 1, <http://www.hlm.org/ima/documents/ECN4199377%20en.pdf>; and "Prohibition of forced evictions," resolution 2004/28, 16 April 2004, para. 1, http://www.hlm.org/ima/documents/E-CN_4-RES-2004-28.pdf.

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, "Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law," A/RES/60/147, 21 March 2006, <http://www.un.org/Docs/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/60/147>.

¹⁸ New Urban Agenda, paragraph 31

¹⁹ Enrique Ortiz Flores, *Social Production of Housing and Habitat*, 2012, p. 73, .

²⁰ Women's Right to the City Manifesto, Global Platform for the Right to the City, 2019, available at: https://www.right2city.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WomensRighttotheCityManifesto_EN_final.pdf

²¹ New Urban Agenda, paragraph 13c

²² New Urban Agenda, paragraph 90



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These principles are closely related to the **Right to the City**,²³ with the **NUA being a pioneering document** in citing it in its overall vision²⁴ and commits states to operationalize many of the Right to the City components referred to above, and the interdependent nature of these components, when it comes to implementation.

Since NUA's adoption, we see the increasing recognition of the Right to the City principles in other international arenas, as the **Human Rights Council**, that has acknowledged the Right to the City and its components in a number of resolutions²⁵. Meanwhile, there is an increased commitment by **local and regional governments**²⁶ to its vision and principles. Despite its inclusion in the NUA, we have seen an increased **invisibilization of the Right to the City and its principles in the work of UN-Habitat**. Instead, the agency has opted for a stronger focus on the 2030 Agenda, leaving aside central commitments and guiding principles included in the NUA and privileging a technocratic, results-based vision towards urban development, and not a rights-based one.

As UN-Habitat and member countries gather to agree on strategies to leverage the current and upcoming UN-Habitat strategic plans, we urge them to focus on concrete action paths anchored in the aforementioned NUA commitments. We call them to:

- 1. Commit to an accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda, leveraging the Right to the City as a driver for its realization**, agreeing on concrete mechanisms for enshrining NUA commitments towards the transformation of urban and economic development models, with the central commitment of protecting the social and environmental function of territories, supporting community-led and social and solidarity initiatives and programmes, as well as advancing the democratic management of cities and territories through inclusive participation and collective decision making;
- 2. Recognise and support local governments and civil society and community-based organizations as key stakeholders for NUA monitoring and effective implementation**, building upon the transformative initiatives being driven by such actors, considering the city as a not-for-profit common good whose management must include the active involvement of the entire social fabric, promoting direct participation to incorporate the priorities, knowledge and practices of those directly affected by projects and policies, such as in the case of the proposed "Global Action Plan for transforming informal settlements and slums;
- 3. Engage in a truly participatory assessment of the UN-Habitat strategic plan**, supporting the participation of civil society, local and regional governments, and other stakeholders through a democratic, inclusive and self-organized Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism consistent with best practices across the UN System. This envisions UN Habitat, governing bodies and all relevant stakeholders advancing policies that lead to actions that support the transformative initiatives being led by those actors, under the principles of decentralization and democratic management of territories. This includes enhancing the people-centered approach by operationalizing the NUA principles and commitments with a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, in stark contrast with the current reality of limited channels for participation in the monitoring framework. These measures would enable concrete action toward realizing the preventing and remedial purposes of human rights in the territories, considering the intersectional aspects of urban inequalities and the disaggregated and qualitative monitoring indicators to better address just and sustainable development of human settlements across the human habitat.

²³ Recognized on NUA paragraph 11 as referring to "the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all".

²⁴ By setting the overall vision for the New Urban Agenda, paragraph 11 of the document evokes the Right to the City, and the efforts of national and local governments to enshrine this vision in legislation, political declarations and charters.

²⁵ See resolution 35/24 on "Human Rights in cities and other human settlements", adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2017

²⁶ See United Cities and Local Governments, "Global Charter Agenda for Human Rights in the City," 2011, https://www.uclg-cisd.org/sites/default/files/UCLG_Global_Charter_Agenda_HR_City_0.pdf; and The Global Platform for the Right to the City and United Cities and Local Governments, "Right to the City Policy Paper," 2019, https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/right_to_the_city_policypaper.pdf.