From the 26 – 28 March, the Habitat International Coalition’s Housing and Land Rights Network organized its 4th Land Forum for the Middle East/North Africa region under the title: “From Broken Promises to People’s Solutions.”

The Land Forum convened experts and social movement activists to share their timely struggles over land and natural resources in Ahwaz, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Western Sahara, as well as the land struggles of the Amazigh, Kurdish and Nubian peoples, addressing:

- Constitutional reform and transitional justice
- Gender dimensions of land
- Conflict, occupation and war
- Environment and water
- Indigenous peoples across the Middle East/North Africa
- Struggles of rural agriculture and food sovereignty
- Urban land and the right to housing.
- International dimensions: Lessons from social movements
- Civic participation in global policy making

The participants confirmed the conviction of previous Land Forums, that civil society across the region faces the challenge to articulate alternatives to current concepts of the state and state land. The strategic methodology of knowledge creation and fundamental policy reform remains rooted in the body of applicable human rights norms. However, this approach also must correct the assumptions of colonial laws and policies, including the legacy of Ottoman rule that continues to dispossess the land and other natural resources of communities and peoples. Alternatives include the fundamental transformation of the state to respect, protect and fulfill the indivisible bundle of human rights to ensure the self-determination of all peoples and nondiscrimination institutionalized through equal citizenship and gender equality. In addition to the state’s obligation to ensure the right to equitable and adequate housing, land, water and productive natural resources, civil oversight of the state must ensure that it upholds these rights through the effective rule of law, progressive realization of rights, dedicating the maximum of available resources and international cooperation, including the states’ extraterritorial obligations to uphold human rights that relate to land and natural resources vis-à-vis all external actors.

Current and future efforts of civil initiatives in the region will seek to develop and apply concepts of the state’s duty to implement the social function of property, social production of habitat and the “right to the city.” The region’s civil society will pursue capacity building through exchanges of experience and expertise with counterparts and social movements in other regions, in order to accelerate knowledge creation, civic education and the development of appropriate programs and strategies. Future knowledge creation by the region’s civil society will seek to develop and apply needed additional indicators to convey the urgent human need for fundamental reforms in land-use and general development policies in our countries.