1. Context

The policies of modernization, support and promotion of the so-called free market, and economic globalization, are implying not only a high social cost, but are also canceling rights achieved through the struggles of the people and closing spaces of individual and collective freedom that previously allowed the people to themselves resolve the satisfaction of their basic needs. Authoritarianism, the centralization of decision-making, and the abandonment by governments of their responsibilities to society have been key factors of this process, which has provoked the growing [divergence] between the "development" project—imposed by minority sectors linked to economic and political powers—and the real world in which the majority of the world's inhabitants live.

HIC develops its work within this context, oriented by precise objectives and by a clear policy that defines its commitment with the social groups that aim to obtain a shelter or more dignified habitat conditions.

2. Background

In the perspective of the plural world and the different working styles and levels of development of our regional networks and principal programs, the HIC structure in place since 1987 has maintained organizational forms that, even though they operated in a very decentralized manner, still reproduced formal [decision-making structures] that seldom represented the work carried out.

In response to the growth of our activity and the sharpening of the global trends pointed out [above], the 1993 HIC General Assembly, which met in Manila, the Philippines, adopted the decision to call for a new review of our principles, operation criteria and organizational structure.

Through the direction of the Board and under the coordination of the extended Executive Committee, several meetings and internal consultations were carried out between late 1993 and late 1996 which led us to undertake a profound revision of the philosophy that guides us and the principles that orient both our external activity and our internal operation. Based on this process of group reflection, a series of organizational objectives and guidelines was prepared
orient the revision of the HIC structure. Based on those guidelines, a new structure proposal was developed that, in addition to reflecting more transparently the values and principles that orient us, was able to respond more effectively to the challenges we currently confront.

Before the legal establishment of the new structure, many of the proposed changes were put into practice with good results. The best ways to incorporate organizational practices and new initiatives developing within many of the regional and thematic bodies were also studied.

Finally, in the Board meetings held in Valle de Bravo, Mexico in October 1996, the final organizational proposal was prepared, and the recommendation of the Board to proceed with the presentation of the proposed Constitutional amendments to the following General Assembly for its consideration was approved by the Assembly held in Mexico City, on 29 October 1996.

The results of this process and the proposed new structure are presented below.

3. Philosophy, Principles and Objectives

3.1. Values and Principles

The linkage of the group of bodies that forms the Coalition should be based on sets of principles, values and objectives known and shared by its members. The Coalition aims to be a decentralized structure, prioritizing substance over form, and emphasizing autonomy, freedom, and flexibility over undue bureaucracy, hierarchies and rigid controls.

The following shared values and principles have been identified:

i. A place to live is as basic a human need as food and clothing. The lack of any of these, or precarious conditions in their satisfaction, deprives human beings of a life in peace and dignity. Physical and psychological health, and even life itself, depend on the possibility of individuals and families to use and enjoy a secure place to live.

ii. Human beings, as all species, have a right to a habitat on earth. The human right to a place to live is an inalienable right.

iii. Land is our common heritage. It is a limited resource not capable of being increased, and should not be subject to market forces, but rather utilized for the common good. Human societies should regulate land for the proper and equitable use by their people.

iv. Policies of modernization, promotion of the so-called free market and economic globalization are closing the spaces that previously allowed people themselves to satisfy their basic needs. We want to protect and reopen those spaces.

v. The new international economic order is controlled by the transnationals that exercise their power through information flows and decisions further and further removed from the concrete interests of the communities they affect. Territorial strategies in accordance with the particular places and
cultures and with social control of the resources must urgently be developed.

vi. The systems of human settlements management are in crisis and we need to look for new models based on participatory democracy.

### 3.2 Organizational Principles

The operating structure of HIC should reflect and comply with the following key principles adhered to by the Coalition. The principles are focused on characteristics of a new democratic and participative organizational model, while incorporating positive aspects of more traditional organizational structures when appropriate.

- **Effectiveness**—administrates the complexity to gain in effectiveness
- **Flexibility**—moldable structures, open spaces
- **Solidarity**—network-building
- **Trust**—solidarity based, on confidence and guided by shared principles and objectives
- **Complexity**—accepts contradiction, cultural differences
- **Responsiveness**—shaped by environment
- **Accountability**
- **Diversity**—plurality
- **Prudence**—ideas + knowledge + action + reflection
- **Devolution**—multilateral information flow, especially returning knowledge to the base
- **Adaptiveness**
- **Partnership**
- **Autonomy**
- **Transparency**—open information flow, communication
- **Accessibility**
- **Gender equality**
- **Stability**
- **Legality**
- **Equity**
- **Efficiency**.

A number of other concepts to orient the operation of the Coalition also were identified. The bodies that make up the structure should be action-oriented and be coordinated by motivational leadership based on the generation of ideas, creativity and strong commitment. The structure should be multicentric, with decentralized responsibility within a simple, flat organizational model. The
structure also should be self-regulating through democratic and participative processes that carry out continuous evaluation, including of concrete impacts. The structure should be organic, in that it should mold to the environment and circumstances, with a minimum of bureaucratic rules, standards and procedures. While it is not a federation, the structure should be based on a federative group of autonomous bodies that form the whole.

### 3.3. Principles of Operation

The following principles should guide the operation of the Coalition:

i. The issues of the Coalition should come from poor communities and disadvantaged peoples, and be channeled into action and mutual information exchange.

ii. The Coalition should operate flexibly to give space to people's initiatives. The Coalition should promote horizontal relations, recognize efforts, and promote a modest attitude letting everybody feel a part of the whole.

iii. The Coalition will build a structure that is participatory, representative, democratic and accountable.

iv. The Coalition does not condone sexist or racist attitudes and behaviors. It should aim to have at least a 60:40 ratio of gender [affirming women's participation] in all its groups.

v. The Coalition promotes the principle of transparency in all its operations; the structure and operations of the various bodies that form the Coalition shall be made know and available to all others in the Coalition.

vi. We promote the principle of solidarity around these values in the different parts of the Coalition. To do this we shall intensively promote the attitude of mutual support and synergy-building rather than individualism among all persons in the Coalition.
External policy: governments and multilateral institutions

Within the perspective provided by these principles and objectives, our Coalition works to compel fulfillment of the following demands presented to the governments and multilateral institutions. These challenges are the basis of our interaction with them.

i. Governments should recognize that the measures to provide adequate housing for all have been incomplete and unsuccessful,

ii. Governments should recognize that the population, through different expressions of the civil society, has in fact the greatest impact on the resolution of human settlements and housing problems through its own various forms of production and improvement of living conditions of houses and cities.

iii. Governments should recognize the current environmental and habitat crisis and declare a state of emergency to be confronted together with the principal actors.

iv. Civil society expressions must be recognized as contributions to dialogue and negotiation in all levels of decision-making in housing and habitat development. The housing sector must be fully democratized, with civil society organizations as full counterparts in dialogue.

v. Governments and multilateral development agencies must recognize that the structural adjustment measures and the modernization and privatization policies that constitute the first steps in the strategy of economic globalization, instead of opening conditions that guarantee access to land and adequate housing for all, are increasing the cost of shelter production and closing spaces to peoples' initiatives, thus increasing the shelter crisis and forcing more people to resort to so-called "illegal" options to fulfill their housing needs.

These demands present us with a series of considerations and challenges for the integration of an organizational structure that allows us effectively to promote changes toward the reversal of the degenerative global trends.

3.4. Organizational Objectives

Three fundamental elements for the revision of the HIC structure are as follows:

- decentralization
- construction of a coalition
- deepening spaces for personal and collective freedom

The following objectives are proposed based on those elements:

1. Achieve a profound decentralization of the initiatives, management and steering of the Coalition.
2. Build, in consequence, a new associative structure prioritizing substance over form: emphasizing autonomy, freedom and flexibility over undue bureaucracy and hierarchies, norms, and rigid controls.

3. Establish democratic procedures for the functioning of the different operational, support and steering bodies that make up the structure of the Coalition, for the selection of their coordinators, representatives and delegates and to ensure their accountability towards their constituency and the organization as a whole.

4. Base the strategic linking of the group of bodies that form the Coalition on sets of principles, objectives, strategies and policies, broadly known and shared by its members.

5. Establish operative coordination mechanisms among steering and support bodies, permanent programs, projects and member initiatives to guarantee unity of action, synergy and mutual strengthening.

6. Establish a minimum group of simple and precise guidelines that guarantee equity in our internal relations, ensure accountability, avoid conflicts, foment internal solidarity and strengthen our efficiency and effectiveness.

### 3.5. Guidelines for the definition of the HIC organizational structure

The new HIC structure is based on the following guidelines which are grouped according to the six proposed objectives.

A  **In relation to the first objective: decentralization**

i) Decentralization is a multilateral process:
   - to decentralize only through the unilateral decision of the center is contradictory;
   - an important part of the decentralization initiative must come from the broader base;
   - genuine decentralization must also empower and mobilize more of our constituency;
   - the decentralization process is to be founded on the initiatives, will, and capacity to do of those bodies and persons in which functions, tasks and responsibilities will be assumed;
   - decentralization should be towards persons capable of demonstrating results.
   - decentralization should not create dependencies but rather empower all sides to increase the potential of the organization as a whole.
   - decentralization should create the spaces necessary for groups at the local, national, and international levels.

ii. Decentralization makes the base grow without weakening the center:
• the center should be strong to support the multiplicity of programs and
• decentralized initiatives
• the center should be capable of managing the complexity, and for that purpose should be able to rely on the necessary capable personnel team, sufficient infrastructure, and adequate work systems;
• in the decentralization process, the center (secretariat, focal points, etc..) should progressively substitute its responsibilities as director and direct executor for activities of support, enabling, and promotion of the diverse programs, projects and initiatives.

iii. Each body is obliged to open its own decentralized space:
• the decentralization process does not end in the Committees and Focal Points, but rather must reach all the levels and initiatives.

iv. In a decentralized structure, the central bodies (such as the Secretariat, Focal Points, etc.) should maintain some form of direct link with the grassroots processes and in project execution to avoid their becoming mere bureaucracies.

B In relation to the second and third objectives: associative structure and democratic procedures

i. The HIC structure should be based on the concrete activity that it develops, and not in abstract and formal representations. It's bases are:
• the regional processes,
• the thematic programs and campaigns that it carries out,
• the specific projects,
• the activities of the Committees and Working Groups,
• the concrete initiatives opened by its members within the HIC framework.

ii. The building of a Coalition can happen only if processes are put into place that will instill confidence in the workings of HIC.
• This can be achieved through demonstrating concrete actions and results, sharing information, and where possible creating spaces for local representation in international global forums such as at the UN.
• Confidence can also be achieved through openness and a learning attitude that allow for a diverse range of groups to join in the building of HIC.

iii. One of the main challenges facing the development and effectiveness of an associative structure is the ability to oversee communication and cross-facilitation among the range of activities with which it is involved.

iv. All activity recognized by the Coalition should have a reference within the organizational structure:
• permanent bodies will represent the permanent work of the Coalition;
short-term bodies or representatives will represent limited-term activities (temporary secretariat services, small committees, short-term representatives, task forces, etc.)

v. Once mature, the regional processes and permanent programs may constitute autonomous bodies such as HIC Regions and Committees that should:

- associate themselves to the Coalition as autonomous bodies;
- have a permanent seat in the HIC directive bodies;
- name their representative(s) before the HIC directive bodies in accordance with their own internal election process;
- have their own administrative and service office (regional or thematic secretariat);
- have freedom of action and propose their own terms of reference, annual plan of action and budget;
- secure their own operating funds with the necessary support of the central entities (Executive Committee, Secretariat);
- communicate and interact with the different parts of HIC to maintain and strengthen the potential of the organization.
- develop strategic contacts with other organizations whose work may be related to housing and living conditions issues to influence the mandates of these organizations.

vi. The peoples’ social processes that are significant in different regions (movements, networks, fronts, dialog or exchange groups) and that are linked to the activity of HIC may be represented in the Board.

vii. Spontaneous initiatives related to the main concerns of HIC should also influence the development of the HIC organizational structure. This will allow HIC to respond to new manifestations of realities.

- The temporary activities, such as international projects that develop within the HIC framework, working groups, task forces, or new initiatives of broad interest also may be invited to send a representative to the Board meetings.

viii. All bodies and representatives that integrate the HIC structure should be accountable to their members and to the Coalition as a whole.

ix. The same principles that orient this proposal should be applied as appropriate within each region and program.

C fourth objective: strategic linking

i. The building of a coalition implies linking diverse persons, institutions, processes and initiatives that share common purposes. This demands of us:

- open and democratic discussion of our objectives, strategies, and policies;
their formal adoption and broad dissemination among members and contacts;
permanent tracking of their application in campaigns, statements, activities, and projects
institutionalization of the review and evaluation processes.

ii. Priority and greater attention should be given to fields of action and types of activity according to:

- their greatest social impact (quantitatively and in terms of quality of life)
- their potential for influence in the reorientation of policies and the development of new instruments
- their capacity to foment linking, interaction, and synergetic strengthening among the diverse programs, projects and bodies that make up the operative structure of the Coalition.

iii. Communication via a shared strategy should be given higher priority over simply information sharing. This strategy-sharing implies:

- coming to agreement on concepts and processes;
- giving priority to the "toward where" and the "how to" over the "notify" and "quantify."

D In relation to the fifth objective: operative coordination:

i. Definition of mechanisms of coordination, interaction and mutual support among the diverse bodies that make up the Coalition.

ii. Definition of terms of reference for all of the directive, support and action bodies of our Coalition, including:

- objectives, general strategies and goals
- basic responsibilities, fields of action and operation criteria
- accountability procedures
- follow up and evaluation criteria

iii. Establishment of plans of action that include:

- objectives vision
- tasks to be carried out
- responsibilities
- timeframes for implementation revision and completion
- necessary resources (human, financial and material) and where to obtain them.

E In relation to the sixth objective: internal operation rules
i. Procedures for the nomination of candidates and the designation or
election of those responsible for directive, support and executive positions
must be properly adapted to the new structure and organizational criteria.

ii. Definition of a minimum of conduct rules that guarantee fair play among
HIC entities, between these and their members, and among members
themselves to avoid:

- competition for resources and positions;
- incorrect use or lack of coordination of the relations with other entities
  and with financial support agencies;
- incorrect use of HIC representation or stationary; undue claim for
  credit for tasks completed; and improperly made individual decisions
  on delicate issues that demand consultation.

iii. Minimum regulation to avoid operative problems and unnecessary costs
such as:

- overlaps and duplication of efforts,
- misuse of institutional resources,
- unjustified or excessive travel costs, improper representation, etc.

4. Structure

4.1. Levels of operation

The new HIC structure distinguishes three levels of operation among the
different bodies that make up the Coalition.

The purpose of the Coalition is to support the social processes that act in the
habitat field. More than an organization that works to the service of its
members, the members are the ones who, organized locally, nationally,
regionally and internationally, aim to serve the social sectors that suffer needs
or violations of their human rights in the habitat field.

For that reason, the base and the first level on which the new structure is built is
the operative level that links the territorial and thematic bodies that work directly
linked to the social processes.

In a second level are located the support bodies, whose main task is to manage
the coordination among the diverse operational bodies. The support bodies
work for the mutual strengthening among the operative groups, motivating
them, promoting them before third parties, facilitating and supporting their
operation and interaction, keeping them informed, helping them to overcome
conflicts that prevent them from reaching higher organizational levels and to
obtain greater strength to confront their challenges, promoting solidarity in
critical situations and, above all, helping them, while respecting their autonomy,
to work more effectively within the shared objectives and strategies.

The support bodies are also guarantors of the fulfillment of the strategies, plans
of .action and programs agreed upon by the steering bodies.

The third level is made up by the steering bodies, which direct the collective
process, developed by the Coalition at the global level. The steering bodies help
to give congruency, direction and strength to the operative base, and to guarantee greater effectiveness to an open and flexible structure oriented by principles of autonomy, decentralization, respect for different approaches and operating styles, respect for diversity and cultural plurality, flexibility, adaptability, complexity, democratic participation and creative freedom, a minimum of norms and bureaucratic regulations and free flow of information.

The joint formulation of strategies and general and programmatic plans of action, supported through a vision provided by the best informed and most committed persons in the diverse fields of activity of the Coalition, guarantees a strategic and democratic steering of the Coalition. This responds to another set of principles oriented to give coherence, consistency and, thus, greater effectiveness to the international work of the Coalition. In this regard stand out the principles of prudence, solidarity building, efficiency, coresponsibility, accountability, transparency, stability, equity, confidence, motivational and committed leadership, and permanent revision and evaluation of the activities and results and of the operative structure itself.

This dialectical interaction among the operative and the directive or steering levels demands radical changes in the selection criteria of the members of the Board to guarantee that those who occupy a position in the Board represent the concrete work developed by the Coalition in support of the social processes.

4.2. Bodies that integrate the HIC structure

A Operational level

i. The Committees are bodies that develop the strategic programs of the Coalition undertaking diverse activities within their specific fields of action.

The Committees are formed by Coalition member organizations and persons interested in actively contributing to the plan of action developed by the Committee itself. The formal recognition of a Committee is made by the Board once the group has complied with the set of requirements that guarantee its solidness and permanence its work is of interregional reach.

ii. The Working Groups develop activities focused on specific themes, either in support of the established Committees, or in the exploration of new areas of interest for the Coalition. The Working Groups are formed by members of the Coalition interested to work in specific themes. Their approval as HIC Working Groups is granted by the Board based on the fulfillment of specific criteria. Their work may be global or regional.

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1 Housing and Land Rights Network, Women and Shelter Network, Habitat and Environment Committee, and others that may emerge in the future.
2 For example, in the case of the Housing and Land Rights Network, activities of research, case documentation, lobbying, fact-finding missions, denunciations, urgent actions, capacity-building, formulation and negotiation of policy and instrument proposals, defense of evicted groups, etc.
3 Finance and Resource Mobilization, Urban Land, Democratic Management and Local Empowerment, and others which might form in the future.
iii. The Regional Reference Centers are organizations that operate regionally in the coordination and development of specific tasks linked to the Committees and/or Working Groups. Their establishment as such develops from the interest and capacity of a member organization to support the development of a specific program in its region.

B Support Level

i. The General Secretariat is responsible for the daily management of the work of the Coalition and the general coordination of its different bodies and activities. It is made up by the General Secretary, named by the Board, and by a technical and administrative support team.

ii. The Focal Points promote, manage and coordinate the whole of activities in each of the approved regions, such as the general tasks linked to the Committees and Working Groups. The Focal Points are named by the Board from among the members of the Coalition in each region, taking into account their capacity and will to fulfill these tasks.

C Steering bodies

i. The General Assembly constitutes the highest directive body of the Coalition. It is made up of all the member organizations, represented by one person designated by each organization.

ii. The Board manages the business of the Coalition according to the directions of the General Assembly. It is made up of the President of the Coalition, a representative from each of the approved regions with up to 100 members, or two delegates from those regions with more than 100 members, one representative from each of the approved Committees, delegates of the Women and Shelter Network, two social movement delegates and, when considered convenient, an associated member named by the Board.

iii. The Executive Committee provides orientation to the General Secretariat between the meetings of the Board. The EC is made up of the President, the Treasurer and the General Secretary himself.

iv. The Management Committee is responsible to assure follow-up to the main decisions of the Board and to orient important decisions that must be made between Board meetings. The Management Committee is, in effect, an extended Executive Committee since it is made up by the Executive Committee plus four members elected by and from the Board and who represent four different programs and regions.