



## **HABITAT INTERNATIONAL COALITION** ***Housing and Land Rights Committee***

**Statement of**  
**HABITAT INTERNATIONAL COALITION (the global NGO alliance on human settlements)**  
**before the special Plenary Session on NGO participation**  
**Habitat II+5 Second Preparatory Committee**  
**Nairobi, 21 February 2001**

*Endorsed by NGOs participating in the Habitat II+5 process*

*Mr. Chairman:*

We, as members of civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), embody a resource of practical and community-based experience and independent analysis aimed at problem solving in this field of human settlements. We have been contributing to development and upholding human rights standards in the spirit and continuity of the social forces that have authored them—long before States codified those principles in international law.

We appreciate that we share a complementary relationship with States. However, in that regard, we hope also that States acknowledge that symbiosis, such that NGOs *must* be included at every level of these deliberations. That recognition has been reaffirmed and operationalized throughout the UN system. Likewise, such partnership and participation stand as a goal and feature of the very “good/improved governance” that is the subject of the HABITAT Programme.

We also note that there is an antidemocratic and regressive trend within this meeting to foreclose nongovernmental society input and turn back the hands of time. This ideological position arises from a Government strategy to exclude civil society voices from the discourse on matters that touch people’s daily lives, as is so clearly the case with economic, social and cultural rights.

*Mr. Chairman:*

It is no contradiction that, considering the patterns of State behavior, the most outspoken of those voices are precisely the ones who have the most to learn. We had hopes that we had reached a higher order than what we are experiencing today. If one were to look at the bright side, civil society would have to approach this as a tremendous training opportunity. We are freshly reminded of the rehabilitation and democratizing work that lies before us.

The denial of existing norms and the open dismissal from the floor of established rights has a distorting effect on the debate. The contagious rejection of norms and guidelines arising from raw impulses of state sovereignty subsequently has been repeated by other members of this Commission. That may be the exception rather than the rule. However, what is surprising, Mr. Chairman, is that, in some cases, that rejection of guidelines on implementing the right to adequate housing and on forced evictions, for example, has come from ratifying State Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This even includes States that have incorporated these norms into their own domestic laws.

We all have a lot to learn, and civil society is as willing as any party to go through that process. We also find ourselves part of the process by which all of our countries have contributed their revolutions, antislavery movements, independence struggles, moral systems and social science to establishing the minimum norms that have formed our common human civilization.

(more)

*Mr. Chairman:*

The exclusion of NGOs has far-reaching implications and sets a dangerous precedent that contradicts the goals and spirit of the United Nations, and contradicts the Secretary General's vigorous promotion of partnerships in the UN's work. Such exclusion also risks reversing all the gains made since 1994 with respect to procedures and substance toward implementing the HABITAT Agenda.

Considering the contributions already made by NGOs and civil society to the HABITAT Agenda *and* its implementation, excluding them now leaves one no alternative but to doubt the sincerity of the Commission itself. At a minimum, the erosion of that legitimacy augurs the withdrawal of important problem solvers and partners in implementing the Agenda in the future.

*Mr. Chairman:*

Most of us prefer to hold forth a candle, rather than merely to curse the darkness. We are always looking for reliable partners and practical mechanisms for progress and here appeal to States, as is natural, to ensure that we are not now entering the tunnel at the end of the light.

(-00-)