

CHARTER FOR WOMEN'S RIGHT TO THE CITY

We have the right to demand equality when inequality renders us inferior, but we have the right to defend the differences when equality de-characterizes us, hides us, or ignores us.

Declaration of Feminist Networks of Latin America and the Caribbean. CEPAL Mexico, 2004

We must admit the gender factor in the city as source of a new shared culture, and we must participate in the definition of a new philosophy of territorial ordering.

European Charter on the Woman in the City, 1996

INTRODUCTION

Where we come from ...

We live in a world in process of rapid urbanization in which cities, as the primary forms of human settlements, simultaneously express the potential of culture, technology and goods and services, product of human development and creativity, capable of guaranteeing the collective wellbeing of humanity. At the same time, the nonrenewable natural elements and resources of the planet are strongly threatened and social exclusion and fragmentation is one of the deepest wounds presented within urban territory.

We know that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few and poverty is the life condition of many. We know that these profound dualities of reality divide the world into rich and poor countries, and cities into citizens and the excluded, the latter lacking the basic social and economic rights that constitute the necessary condition to acquire citizenship status.

We also know that the world economic system characterized by intensification of capitalist relations, with unfair rules of international trade, curtailment of national sovereignties, and reduction of the State role as primary guarantor of universal human rights, is not removed from this reality. On the contrary, it is consequence and intrinsic condition of the functioning of the neoliberal model, based on the logic of maximization of economic benefits.

We know that acquirement of greater profits requires conditions in which the work of men and women as well as nature and its resources are the adjustable variables. And we know that the imposition of economic fundamentalism legitimizes war and armed conflict between countries.

We know that women are those primarily affected by an economic model that excludes them from its benefits, and on the contrary erodes their rights by considering them cheap labor for the operation of the global economy, at the same time that they assume the social cost of privatization of public services that had previously been responsibility of the States.

Therefore, we should also know that, more than "reducing" inequality between countries and "alleviating" the poverty of broad social sectors within them, it is necessary to eradicate the economic model that produces them. This would appear to be the challenge of men and women in contemporary democracies.

Why a Women's Charter for the Right to the City?

Women and feminism, through the generation and divulgence of knowledge and development of actions, linked among community women from distinct social sectors, their organizations and networks, and academic and political bases, have led one of the greatest cultural changes of the past century, contributing a new interpretation of the world and society by questioning the subordination of women as the basis of social relations and thereby allocating new contents to concepts such as democracy, citizenship, and participation.

The active role of women's and feminist organizations in distinct international spaces such as the United Nations Conferences has enabled the incorporation of specific commitments within governmental action platforms to respond to women's demands and proposals for the achievement of their rights, to education, to health, to paid employment, to political participation, and to the right to decide regarding their bodies. The right to the city and access to the goods and services of the same is one of those rights. This is undeniably a significant advance, given that women have historically contributed to the construction of human settlements, while the planning of the same has not incorporated women's needs and excludes them from the decisions that affect their lives.

Much has been said and formulated by the world's governments in terms of statements and commitments regarding the rights demanded by women and specifically to guarantee adequate environments for life in rural and urban settlements. These commitments have been expressed in the United Nations Conferences on the Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), Women (Beijing 1995), and Habitat II (Istanbul 1996), among others. We know that these declarations are not legal instruments but rather only recommendations. On the other hand, CEDAW, approved in 1979 and ratified in 1981, is a legally binding instrument and constitutes a relevant reference for governmental commitments to equality of opportunities for women in all spheres of life.

We can not fail to mention the objectives of the Millennium Goals in relation to human settlements, or the progress made in relation to recognition of new economic, social and cultural rights and their placement at the same level as civil and political rights in terms of the possibility to demand States' compliance with their acquired obligations.

Substantive progress has been achieved by the placement of topics of interest to the world community from women's perspective within the social agenda and that of governments. However, as expressed by various declarations of women's and feminist organizations to the entities responsible for the follow-up to said commitments, the gaps between the statements and effective implementation of the same remain quite relevant. In particular, mechanisms to enforce them remain weak, as do the economic resources allotted for their promotion and for the monitoring of their fulfillment.

In addition, local governments have ratified commitments in favor of women in specific international spaces such as the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government (Harare 1998) and the recent Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of "Cities and United Local Governments" (Paris 2004).

In this sense, the present International Charter for Women's Right to the City proposes to emphasize the challenges yet pending to achieve the equitable and democratic cities to which we all aspire. It also revisits the "European Charter of Women in the City" (1995) and the declarations of "Building Cities for Peace" (2003) and the "Montreal Declaration on Women's Security" (2002).

It is a Charter open to future and new proposals. This is the path opened by the women's and feminist organizations in the world to achieve many of the rights from which we were historically excluded. Articulating efforts among women from all countries and regions, critically evaluating the results of actions, respecting the diversity that characterizes us (social class, ethnicity, age, nationality, culture) and developing consensus around interests in pursuit of "another possible world," in which the sexual difference does not necessarily translate into social inequality. From the experiences, we women have learned to construct, reformulate, propose and move forward.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. WOMEN AND DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE CITY

1.1 Participation and local power

The systematic integration of women invigorates the democratic foundations, efficiency, and quality of local governments. So that local governments may satisfy the needs of women and men, they must base themselves on the experiences of both genders through balanced representation in all decision-making levels ranging across the broad spectrum of responsibilities of local governments (IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, 1998).

However:

The percentage of women's participation in the highest executive and political decision-making positions in city governments in all countries is far from equitable, given that women as political subjects in practice lack a position of equality.

Women's areas, when they exist in local governmental structures, are de-hierarchized and lack assigned budgets and capacity to place proposals into operation.

The unpaid and "volunteer" work in the community, in particular in the poorest and most impoverished sectors of our cities, is carried out by women, as a result of the privatization and/or reduction of public services, and "naturalized" as an extension of the domestic-private work historically assigned to women.

Women fulfill the role of mediators and activators of the social programs and services of public policies and are not beneficiaries themselves as citizens.

1.2 Participation in urban and territorial planning

It is necessary to formulate and reinforce policies and practices to promote women's full participation and equality in the planning of human settlements and in the adoption of related decisions (Habitat II, 46e).

However:

- Women remain absent from decisions linked to the territorial and urban planning of our cities, i.e. decisions on the context and physical environment in which they live, work, and dream. They constitute more than 50% of the population of cities, and their participation in human settlements construction, improvement and maintenance is a recognized fact, given the leadership role they have historically assumed in urban social movements in defense of land, housing and services.

1.3 Participation in control of public investments and expenditure

Participation is a citizen demand and condition of democratic management of cities: the participative budget is potentially one of the most important tools that some governments have begun to implement, responding to criteria of transparency, given that it expresses the economic, social and cultural priorities and therefore represents those who benefit from the assignment and distribution of public resources.

However:

- The budget is considered gender-neutral, assuming that it responds to the needs of the population as a whole, denying the existence of social, age, cultural, and sexual differences and therefore ignoring women's specific needs and requirements, as well as their economic contributions through unremunerated labor in the private and community sphere.

1.4 Obstacles to women's participation and active citizenship

To participate it is necessary to have the conditions to do so; the freedom and the right are not enough. Equitable treatment in a context of inequality can mean reinforcement of inequalities. We know that needs are not balanced in a field of equality, but rather the needs of those who hold the greatest power (social and gender) prevail, subsequently legitimizing the interests of the latter as collective interests.

However:

Obstacles persist for women's real participation, products of the sexual division of work in the home, the lack of economic resources, of time in light of the burden of activities (remunerated and domestic work), of mobility, and of access to information, and their under-representation in the organizations of the community.

Discrimination also exists specifically affecting determined social groups. "Women are not all equal but some of us are more equal than others, and young women, the indigenous, displaced, migrants, afro-descendants, organized or not, have been left out of the public decision-making that affects their lives" (Declaration of Latin American Feminist Networks. CEPAL, Mexico 2004).

2. WOMEN AND THE RIGHT TO A SUSTAINABLE CITY

2.1 Access to urban public services

Women are the primary users of urban services and facilities, given that regardless of their incorporation within the remunerated workforce, labor division within the household has not changed and women continue to hold primary responsibility for domestic and intermediate activities to fulfill family needs. The incompatibility of locations of housing, employment and urban activities, and the resulting repercussions on the “time resource,” constitute some of women’s greatest obstacles to their autonomy and active citizenship.

However:

- Trade and financial liberalization, with its process of privatizations, has a continually heavier affect on public policies related to provision of essential services, impacting the economy of social maintenance and reproduction, with the burden falling primarily on the shoulders of women (Feminist Networks Declaration. CEPAL, Brazil).

Despite governmental declarations and commitments (Habitat II, 1996), urban and housing policies in practice continue to a large degree to assume a limited concept of housing, without taking into account its interdependence with access to employment, public services, infrastructure networks, or environmental quality, with consequences in the lives of the population and in particular women.

2.2 Access to clean water

According to UNIFEM research, women hold the responsibility for water management at the domestic and community levels in the majority of developing countries. “This gender inequality has implications in women’s daily lives, not only from the perspective of their rights, but also impeding them from becoming involved in activities such as education, income generation, politics, leisure and recreation.” (WHRnet. Women and the privatization of water, 2003)

However:

- The privatization of water, imposed on many countries by the World Bank and the IMF as condition for allocation of loans, excludes those who can not pay for it from access to the service, placing at risk the lives and health of the population and in particular women. Of the 1.2 billion persons without access to water, more than half are women and girls. (WHRnet. Women and the privatization of water, 2003)

2.3 Security conditions in the city

The perception of urban insecurity is one of the most worrisome problems of our cities, aggravated by the authoritative and repressive response to the same promoted by the communications media. Violence that is experienced or perceived as a real threat exercises a restrictive effect for access, use and appropriation of the city by its citizens and in particular women, constituting one of the most important obstacles for their mobility and therefore their autonomy.

However:

The insecurity specifically affecting women, both violence in the private sphere and gender violence in the city, tends to be invisible. Aggressive and violent behaviors, in the streets, public spaces, and transportation services, include insults, sexual harassment, and rape. This criminality is rarely denounced and even less often punished, as evident in the significant gap between cases denounced by victims and the punishment of aggressors. The physical planning of the city does little to recognize and take into consideration the link between crime prevention and the conditions and design of the city and its public spaces.

2.4 Mobility in the city

Public transportation is used more predominantly by women, who must often travel with small children or accompanied by elderly or infirm persons. The conditions of public transportation, including its routes, security, and functionality, condition people's decisions regarding activities to be carried out in terms of the economic and time costs. In addition, women's movement around the city is different than that of men due to their necessity to balance remunerated and domestic work.

However:

In many cities, and in particular in the larger ones in which transportation needs involve greater distances, public transportation is deficient, in particular in the poorer sectors, constituting an obstacle to the search for better labor opportunities, citizen participation, recreation possibilities, and leisure time activities.

The differentiated needs of men and women in relation to mobility in the city are not considered in public transportation policies. Social exclusion increases in the poorest sectors, isolating women in their homes and neighborhoods.

2.5 The relation with the environment

The environmental risks to health related to pollution in the urban areas "may have a disproportionate effect on the health of women and children in reason of their different susceptibility to the toxic effects of diverse chemical substances, their different exposure to them, and the character of the tasks frequently carried out by women" (Habitat).

However:

The elevated environmental pollution in urban areas of the majority of countries is increasing, aggravated by accelerated urbanization, deforestation of natural areas, and use of noxious chemical products. An estimated one billion persons currently live in informal settlements without basic sanitation services in environmental risk areas, and in homes constructed with materials which are inadequate or dangerous for human health.

In developing countries, multinational companies often do not comply with labor legislation on personal protection and safety conditions in the workplace, or with the environmental impact control norms required in their countries of origin. In many production areas, the cheap labor is provided by women.

- Environmental and sustainable development policies consider women as either victims of the environmental deterioration or as a useful resource as “environmental agents” to counter the ecological deterioration and favor the effectiveness of actions. Women are absent in decision-making levels regarding management of natural resources and in particular nonrenewable resources.

2.6 Access to secure housing tenure

There are advances in the majority of countries regarding legal frameworks that recognize women’s right to property and inheritance. The majority of national constitutions do not restrict juridical equality between men and women and protect the right to property, especially private property, favoring housing acquisition by all citizens.

However:

Cultural practices and mechanisms persist that limit the effective application of laws. The women of poor and impoverished sectors, single mothers, women displaced by armed conflicts, natural disasters or economic speculation of land, migrant women, as well as indigenous and afro-descendent women, suffer limitations and/or discrimination for access to secure tenure of housing or to subsidies and credits for the same.

A high percentage of women are unable to meet the eligibility criteria imposed for access to subsidized or defrayed-cost housing. Such programs presume regular incomes and formal employment, while women’s income comes from informal and unstable jobs.

PROPOSAL

WORLD FORUM OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WORLD FORUM OF CULTURES.

BARCELONA, JULY 2004

DIALOGUE: WOMEN AND THE CITY

1. Recognizing the commitments contracted by the governments of cities “to create peaceful, sustainable societies, inclusive for all, based on solidarity, respect for citizenship, for governance and for human rights.” (Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of Cities and United Local Governments, Paris 2004).
2. Recognizing the commitments contracted by city governments to women, expressed in CEDAW and the various United Nations conferences on the Environment (Rio 1992), Women (Beijing 1995), and human settlements (Istanbul 1996). These commitments are results of the consensus of the governments with civil society, and are the product of decades of work by women’s and feminist organizations articulating demands and proposals related to the expansion of their citizen rights.

3. Recognizing the commitments of city governments in the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government (1998) as well as the Final Declaration of the Constituent Assembly of Cities and United Local Governments (Paris, May 2004).

4. Ratifying the distinct declarations of the women's and feminist organizations at the international level in the follow-up and monitoring processes of the commitments acquired by the governments of the world's cities in the distinct United Nations conferences.

We women, ask the governments of the cities, to:

COMPLY WITH THEIR ACQUIRED COMMITMENTS

ASSIGN RESOURCES FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

DEMONSTRATE ADVANCES THROUGH QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY MEASURABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

1. DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF TERRITORY

“There is no democracy without joint participation of women and men in the spheres of local representation and decision. Women's participation in local politics and the resolution of their objectives of equality will be one of the central concerns of our organization.”

Cities and United Local Governments, Paris, 5 May 2004

With the goal to create sustainable, equalitarian and democratic local governments, in which women and men can participate in equitable form in decision making, and so that they have comparable access to services, the gender perspective should be transversely integrated in all sectors of policy definition and local government management.

IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, Zimbabwe 1998

To make this effective, we women issue a call to action and we state that the following are necessary:

Affirmative legislations, such as quota or affirmative-action laws that guarantee the participation of women in local government in the maximum spheres of decision-making, both executive and legislative, as well as in councils, neighborhood associations, etc., supporting the formation of female leadership.

Formal recognition of women's and feminist organizations as interlocutors of the local government of cities, for decision making in public policy matters and specifically for the physical planning of the city (provision of

infrastructure and services, urban security, housing projects, public spaces), institutionalizing consultation and participation procedures that respond to the differentiated and specific needs of female and male citizens.

Institutionalize women's areas with independent budgets within the structures of local city governments that guarantee the transversal integration of gender in all areas of municipal tasks and in the government's public policies, programs and plans.

Develop actions that guarantee conditions for effective participation of women in decisions regarding the city, in environmental ordinance, and in local development taking into account existing obstacles for participation on a level playing field (cultural stereotypes, unequal distribution of domestic labor, unemployment, single female heads-of-households, age, social condition, or discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, or sexual orientation).

Implement public policies that contribute to transform the division of labor in the private world and to modify the dichotomy between public and private activities and the necessary cultural changes.

Elaborate gender-sensitive participative budgets that guarantee the participation of women and their organizations in the definition of priorities for allocation of public expenditures and investments within the city territory, taking into account their diversity, age groups, ethnicity and culture.

Incorporate surveys on use of time within official statistics to make visible the economic contribution made by women through production of goods and services within the household as well as community activities and social policies, based on women's time and unpaid labor. The work undertaken by women who organize to improve the conditions of their community should be remunerated with wages and just social benefits.

Develop urban gender indicators that identify the quality of life in the city of male and female citizens through access to different services, and which at the same time monitor the effective fulfillment of governmental commitments with equality of opportunities for women and men in access to and appropriation of the city.

2. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AS A HUMAN RIGHT

The right to the city is inter-linked and interdependent to all of the internationally recognized human rights, conceived in an integral manner. It therefore includes the right to land, to means of subsistence, to work, to health, education, culture, shelter, social protection, security, a healthy environment, sanitation, public transportation, entertainment, information, etc.

World Charter for the Right to the City. Signed by social organizations and movements. WSF, Porto Alegre 2002.

To make it effective, we women issue a call for action and determine that the following elements are necessary:

1. Access to security of tenure of housing and to urban services, goal requiring the following actions:

Promote affirmative actions that effectively equalize women's rights with those of men, recognizing that, beyond the laws that establish equality of rights between the genders, cultural transformation (of practices, traditions, etc.) is required to overcome situations of subordination and inequity.

Implement housing policies that contemplate the differentiated social insertion of women, which in the case of the poorest women is fundamentally in the informal economy, as well as different situations of social vulnerability: women displaced by armed conflicts, immigrants, single household heads, etc.

Incorporate the perspectives of cultural and ethnic diversity within public housing policies, eliminating all form of discrimination in access to housing, credits and subsidies, based on sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, creed or nationality, without ignoring women's specific interests in an atmosphere of equity.

Develop a policy of functional decentralization that considers equitable distribution of urban services and facilities across the territory. Also, contemplate within housing policies access to services interdependent to housing as well as urban activities in general that foster quality of life.

Prioritize creation of infrastructure, services and facilities oriented to the dependent population (children, the elderly, the disabled) whose care has been and continues to be assumed by women, constituting an obstacle for their full citizenship.

Consider within the design of the city the suppression of architectural barriers that hinder the use of the city or discriminate against and exclude persons with temporary or permanent disabilities, the elderly, etc.

Effectively control the rise in cost and the loss of quality of services which are passed to the management of private companies within the accelerated process of privatizations, guaranteeing access to public services for the whole of society. In addition, develop mechanisms to guarantee said access (subsidies or differentiated tariffs) in particular for the most socially-excluded sectors, among which are women. The local governments should assume this responsibility jointly with the companies, with the participation of all the social sectors.

* **Guarantee, especially, access to clean water and sanitation**, considering its impact on the health of the population and that of women in particular who are most exposed to problems of lack of the same given the domestic and community activities socially assigned to them, as well as the consequences on their daily lives (increased time and labor demands). Water is not a merchandise item, and should therefore not be privatized or commercialized.

2. Public transportation that is safe and adequate for women's mobility requirements

Generate information disaggregated by sex on movement around the city through studies on the origins and destinations of trips, to be reflected in the design of public transportation policies that respond to the differentiated needs of women and men, to facilitate use, enjoyment and appropriation of the city.

Incorporate physical security within the transportation system as a conditioning factor of the mobility of persons, minimizing situations of risk and aggression, in particular against women.

3. Safe cities for women, safe cities for all

Design public policies on urban security that prevent the violence exercised against women and children in the city based on new forms of care and protection of persons that emphasize a preventative and not a repressive approach, involving all social sectors, including men and women.

Integrate urban security as attribute of physical space in planning of the city and of social programs and projects that promote more secure public spaces, neighborhood settings, city centers, streets, and city outskirts for all citizens.

Promote awareness campaigns on violence against women in the framework of human rights directed to the population in general, involving distinct social sectors, the education community, and in particular the communications media as primary shapers of public opinion and potential allies in the questioning of cultural stereotypes that legitimize violent conducts against women.

4. Cultural transformations that reverse situations of social inequity and gender subordination in all spheres of life

Commit local governments to prioritize the training of functionaries, employees and professionals in the gender theme to foster its transversal integration within the design of public policies and urban programs and projects.

Commit the educational sector in general and universities in particular to promote gender as constitute part of knowledge within the different disciplines, in particular those of architecture and urban planning, and to promote research that contributes to transform the andocentric vision of the city.

Commit the communications media to constitute themselves as the primary disseminators of a culture of equity between men and women, questioning stereotypes that promote women's subordination in society and consolidate their exclusion in the city.

Commit men and women to work jointly to create a global, just, equitable and solidary society. To achieve this society, it is necessary to understand that the sexual division of labor is one of the obstacles for women's full citizenship. The city, the organization of the space as expression of social and gender relations, can and should promote necessary cultural changes.

We the women gathered at the World Forum of Women issue a call for the points raised in this charter to be considered in the "World Charter for the Right to the City" and Local Agenda 21 on Culture (to be approved by the Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion). Both initiatives will be presented at the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September 2004.