



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



HUIAIROU COMMISSION
Women, Homes & Community



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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 trend 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.

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,

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

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 settlements**
- 2. Ensuring that the participatory principles and practices of social and solidarity economy (SSE)⁹ are mainstreamed,**
- 3. Committing to participatory principles and practices,¹⁰ progressing towards democratic management of cities and territories.**
- 4. Combatting, preventing and remedying forced evictions as a gross violation of human rights, in particular, the human right to adequate housing.**
- 5. Support for the social production of habitat**
- 6. Respecting, protecting and fulfilling women's equal rights and their right to the city¹¹ in a human rights habitat.**

These principles are closely related to the **Right to the City**,¹² with the **NUA being a pioneering document** in citing it in its overall vision¹³ 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 resolutions¹⁴. Meanwhile, there is an increased commitment by **local and regional governments**¹⁵ to its vision and principles. It is necessary we have more **visibility of the Right to the City and its principles in the work of UN-Habitat.**

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

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

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ 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

¹² 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".

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ See resolution 35/24 on "Human Rights in cities and other human settlements", adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2017

¹⁵ 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.

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.