



**PrepCom3 – Habitat III**

**Statement by the Office of**

**the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

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A key revolutionary trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is indeed urbanization. The vision of the urban miracle is captured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which governments commit to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (Goal 11). Governments further commit to leave no-one behind, envisaging "a world of universal respect for equality and non-discrimination", including gender equality, and reaffirm the responsibilities of all States to "respect, protect and promote human rights, without discrimination or distinction of any kind".

The trend towards rapid urbanization has however, often gone hand in hand with the creation of more slums, inadequate living conditions, insecure tenure to housing and land, and greater disparities as well as discrimination.

The challenges before us are many.

Demand for food is expected to rise at least by 35 percent by 2030, while the demand for water by 40 percent. Nearly half of the world's population will experience severe water stress.

Housing, water, education, health or fair administration of justice are not mere commodities - They are rights to which all are entitled, without discrimination – under international human rights law. They are also public goods. Though all too often urbanization processes have too often narrowly focused on growth, on markets, and on private investment.

Sustainable, and fair urbanization models can be achieved only when guided by human rights principles which include:

1. The free, active and meaningful participation of all inhabitants, in particular the most marginalized.
2. Accountability of duty bearers for respecting, protecting and promoting the human rights of all inhabitants with a focus on transparency, public scrutiny and mechanisms for redress.
3. Addressing the root causes of discrimination, inequalities and violence - not only on the basis of gender and geography, but also on the basis of race, culture, religion, age, disability and social and economic status.
4. Deploying the maximum available resources for the progressive realization of the social, economic and cultural rights of city dwellers.

A human rights approach is a practical and vital framework to make cities work for people as places of equal opportunity for all, where people can live in security, peace and dignity. To this end, there is a need to:

- Establish a system to monitor progress in achieving the commitments of the New Urban Agenda. Such a system should contain measurable goals, targets and timelines, and be based on disaggregated data which allows for an assessment of the situation of city-dwellers, particularly those that are the most vulnerable.
- Clarify responsibilities and establish accountability for results in realizing the stated goals and intended impacts.

Let me now spend a moment on the right to adequate housing.

we talk about housing, we are not just talking about four walls and a roof. The right to adequate housing is about security of tenure, affordability, access to services and cultural adequacy. It is about protection from forced eviction and displacement. It is a right for all regardless of social status and origin.

To promote the right to adequate housing, urbanization processes and policies cannot be based solely on economic and financial data that disregard the human being behind numbers. It is important to look at a wide range of issues which impact the enjoyment and realization of this right including, speculation, gentrification, discrimination toward various groups, bias towards home-ownership against other forms of tenure, lack of protection of tenants, etc.

It is important as well to acknowledge the crucial role of national and local authorities who are key partners and indeed movers, in the realization of the right to adequate housing and other human rights in cities.

Sometimes we hear that attention to human rights will hamper development. This is the case only when development and urbanization are done in an unsustainable way, creating more disparities and marginalization. As stated by the UN Secretary-General a couple of weeks ago at the opening of a High-Level Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on human rights at the centre of the global agenda: "Human rights are norms and standards, against which institutions and Governments are measured. But they are not just abstract ideas, or aspirations to be addressed once peace and development have been attained. They call for extremely specific and concrete actions on the part of States and other authorities... In our deeply connected world, all Member States have a shared best interest in promoting individual and collective human rights as a basis for global peace and prosperity".

Distinguished participants, Human rights provide the framework for sustainable development. Without rights urbanization and development may only achieve superficial and quick wins that might generate long term social problems and tensions.

I thank you for your attention.