

# Habitat International Coalition

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## Habitat International Coalition (HIC) on the International Land and Housing Rights Day

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For the international organisations during the past 30 years, the topic of the city has moved from being completely abandoned to being seen as the only engine of development. Change came about along with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, in 1996, the United Nations II Conference on Human Settlements was renamed the Summit of the Cities, relegating the problem of rural habitat, where a half the world's population live in increasing eviction.

The celebration of this 4th October, 2004 marks a change in the way of thinking for the international organisations in considering cities as 'engines of rural development'. As HIC have rigorously argued in the past years, the city is moreover, the 'machine that sucks in the rural population and its economic surplus'; more than just a motor, it is the seat of economic and political interests. For the people from the countryside, the city symbolises getting into poverty, exploitation of natural resources, losses of traditions; it is the main cause of mass migration. With the frequent construction of new roads and interaction with the developed world has meant a plundering of land and of subsistence means, destruction of cultures and traditional institutions and on many occasions the denial of human rights.

Do the international organisations intend to reverse this process? Do they have the intention of favouring the countryside habitants and of improving their livelihoods? Where are the conditions that would make the grave problems of the countryside more aware, about the violation of human rights that prevail there, about the historic responsibility that we all have with respect to the conditions in which Indigenous people, peasants and small farmers in Asia, Africa and Latin America live in.

The official United Nations messages from the Secretary General and from the Executive Director from the Habitat Programme highlight the intention of viewing the countryside and city as part of one whole entity. They outlines a series of actions that happen and that could take place with more investment in infrastructure and communications. They identify the weakness of ties and links between the city and countryside as the main cause of rural poverty, which hinders a favourable outcome for the countryside habitants.

HIC subscribes the challenge of an integral focus on urban-rural development and the importance of human interaction between the city and countryside.

Nevertheless, HIC does not accept that the solution to this structural, worldwide problem can be tackled without further and deeper analysis of the causes.

HIC considers the recommendations based on good intentions as insufficient, because they are not related with what actually happens in poorer countries. In the industrialised countries, the countryside is heavily subsidised and can count on all types of assistance. This type of support is not given to the countryside habitants in developing countries.

The international organisations and multilaterals have been created to seek for equality and justice between the nations. HIC cannot accept therefore, as the only road to development being the direct relationship that exists today between big corporations and cities.

HIC questions the current phenomena of competitiveness amongst cities attaining more multinational companies and foreign investment, in detriment of the necessary investment in order to improve the living conditions in marginal, rural and urban settlements.

The neighbourhood and security improvement schemes in vogue in most big cities, seem to give more confidence to the capitals as to attack the deep rooted causes of growing inequality, abandonment of the countryside and the poor urban livelihood.

HIC would like to call all its members, allies and collaborators to pursue last years campaign, now under the slogan of "**A right to land and housing now**".

We would like to denounce violation against the right to land and housing; to denounce the negative social impacts of the neo liberal housing policies; and to propose alternatives to the people's process of housing production and management in the countryside and in the cities.

The massive evictions in Asia; the lack of basic services and of women's rights to land tenure in Africa; the need of legal and financial instruments that facilitate the production and management of city by and for the people in Latin America; the fight against the increasing privatisation of social housing and equipment in Europe and North America; the denouncing of the social impacts inflicted by war and violence in the Middle East. These are the issues that raise deep concern and lead to proposals between the social organisations and movements, NGO's and other members of the Habitat International Coalition.

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