

World Human Rights Cities Forum 2016

Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities: Urban Development, Housing and Environment

With the Support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

21-24 July 2016

Asia Culture Center, Gwangju, Republic of Korea

Concept Note

Background

1. The World Human Rights Cities Forum 2016 will be held in Gwangju, Republic of Korea, from 21 to 24 July 2016 under the theme of *Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities: Urban Development, Housing, and Environment*.
2. This year's venue, the [Asia Culture Center](#), is significant by itself. It was built as the biggest cultural complex in modern Korea at the historical site of the former provincial hall in memory of the May 18 Democratization Movement.
3. The WHRCF is an annual gathering of key actors and stakeholders engaged in building a human rights city as a follow-up to five previous forums held since 2011 in order to implement the vision of a human rights city as articulated in the [Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities](#) adopted on 17 May 2011 at the first WHRCF. This year, for the first time, the Forum will be held with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to highlight the interconnection between the international and local mechanisms for the promotion and protection of Human Rights.
4. We are pleased to observe that for over 16 years, human rights have been increasingly inscribed in the agendas of local authorities all over the globe, from the [European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City](#) (2000) signed by more than 350 European towns and cities to those of Montreal (2006), Mexico (2010), Gwangju (2012) and Vienna (2012) to the adoption of the Global Charter-Agenda of Human Rights in the City (2011) adopted by UCLG.
5. However, further progress is still needed to make human rights a reality in our cities. According to the [Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities](#) of 2011, human rights mainstreaming emphasizes the human rights-based approach where all inhabitants, regardless of race, gender, colour, nationality, ethnic background and social status in particular minorities and any other groups who are socially vulnerable and marginalized can participate fully in the decision-making, policy-implementation and monitoring processes that affect their lives in accordance with human

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rights principles such as non-discrimination, rule of law, participation, empowerment, transparency and accountability.

6. This year, the WHRCF will take place in the particular context of preparing a new agenda at the UN [Habitat III](#) Summit to be launched by the UN States, local governments and civil societies in Quito (Ecuador) from 15 to 17 October, 2016. As the third conference of the United Nations, after Habitat I (Vancouver, 1976) and Habitat II (Istanbul, 1996), Habitat III aims to set a new sustainable global urban agenda, in a world where 55% of the population live in cities and where urban dwellers will represent more than 66% of the world population in 2050. As a result, the international community is looking to the Habitat III Conference to set the basis to address the challenges of a sustainable urbanization of the planet. To that end, the New Global Urban Agenda should concretize and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 and the COP21 Agreement of Paris in December 2015.
7. Thus, this urban reality tackles crucial questions for the future of the majority of the world population: a) How to build cities for everyone without marginalizing or ghettoizing millions, b) How to build cities as spaces for achieving an adequate standard of living and providing opportunities for all the inhabitants, c) How to include new migrants and displaced people, d) What measures to take to allow local governments to guarantee rights to housing, water, sanitation, education, healthcare, healthy environment, employment, participation, culture, security, among others, e) How to guarantee access to public services for all and to improve urban mobility, f) How to face climate change with its severest impact on the poorest, and g) How to promote intercultural and intergenerational cities without discrimination.

Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities, a common approach for Habitat III Agenda

8. Under the theme of *Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities*, the Forum aims to address the key issues of a human-rights based approach to this Agenda, relating the crucial challenges of Urban Development, Housing and Environment to the internationally recognized Human Rights norms and following the Gwangju Guiding Principles for Human Rights Cities.
9. WHRCF 2016 will be held just prior to the last preparatory committee of Habitat III takes place in Surabaya (Indonesia) from 25 to 27 July 2016 and the outcome and commitments of Human Rights Cities network would play a crucial role to demonstrate to the international community that Human Rights Cities are possible and necessary!
10. Since its first edition in 2011, the Gwangju WHRCF has given a common definition of a ‘human rights city’, strengthening Human Rights cities movement all around the world and contributing to the dissemination of the [Gwangju Guiding Principles for Human Rights Cities](#) among civil society, local governments, national and international institutions.
11. As defined in WHRCF 2011, a Human Rights City is ‘both a local community and a socio-political process in the local context where human rights play a key role as the fundamental

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values and guiding principles'. Indeed, human rights cities respond to a "human rights governance in the local context where local governments, local parliaments, civil society, private sector organizations and other stakeholders work together to improve the quality of life for all inhabitants in the spirit of partnership based on human rights standards and norms."

12. In September 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee presented its report on the Role of Local Government in the promotion and protection of Human Rights (A/HRC/30/49). It acknowledges that local governments together with the states are responsible for the respect, promotion and protection of human rights. At the same time, this report shows that local governments are particularly crucial for the promotion and protection of human rights such as education, health, housing, environment, law and order, and the right to water because of their proximity to citizens as providers of public services, and for their specific role in that preventing discrimination against the marginalised.
13. The WHRCF in Gwangju has played a very important role in the adoption of this report, through its 4th and 5th editions via two experts workshops. The forthcoming Forum promises to take us further through exchange of practices and ideas generated thus far within the framework of the network of Human Rights Cities and the Habitat III process.
14. The concept of *Human Habitat Friendly Cities* refers to *People Friendly Cities* with human beings at the centre so that cities can be a place of collective well-being, based on the full exercise of rights for all. City life is supposed to offer diverse functions to its inhabitants. Cities are simultaneously a habitat, a purveyor of belonging, identity, citizenship, work, culture, leisure, as well as a site for production and consumption. The UN Special Reporter for Housing Right, in [her latest report](#), affirms that cities should convey various urban rights. Although Habitat II acknowledged the centrality of Human Rights, the recent decades have seen the emergence of competitive cities as the dominant pattern for urban development. This approach has not been conducive to advancing equity. Rather, through various policies designed to attract more investments, such an approach has contributed to the financialization of cities resulting increasingly speculative processes. Hence, today cities do not fulfil their primary and foremost function of serving the people. The world over, cities are no longer creating enabling environments to lead a good life by meeting required needs including of access to housing, jobs, markets, qualitative public spaces and leisure. On the contrary, cities are burgeoning sites of exclusion and segregation. Only by putting people at the centre of the processes of development of the city, and through a human rights based approach, can the negative trends be arrested and reversed.
15. The 6th WHRCF will focus on three main issues to rethink the way we build cities and place people at the core of the urban fabric: Urban Development, Housing and Environment. There are three crucial questions to build People Friendly Cities: a) A thorough analysis on the main paradigm of competitive cities and its consequences in the last decade that has impacts at the spatial level of a city through urban inequalities, privatization of public spaces and services, growing economic development programs based on infrastructures projects that in some cases

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generate exclusion; b) this forum will address the issue of the growing lack of access to housing for all in cities due to the increase of prices, development of inadequate housing and slums as poverty gaps grow in cities and their periphery and surroundings. The issue of housing will be also related to the human rights that people should own while living in cities. Alternative policies and practices to realize the right to adequate housing such as social production of habitat, collective housing and public housing will be presented; c) Finally, through the issue of environment, the forum will address the impact of cities on climate change, and its consequences in terms of social inequalities, and it will also insist on the need of recognizing environmental rights for urban dwellers based on more balanced urban-rural linkages, urban ecology and new ecological process, and mobility policies.

Objectives of 6th World Human Rights Cities Forum

16. The main goals of the Forum are: a) To expand the human rights cities' movement worldwide in order to promote solidarity and mutual cooperation among them. It is believed that human rights mainstreaming through the human rights-based approach if rightly and fully implemented at all stages of a human rights city including budgeting, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, can and must be a key to successful innovation to make a city a common space for solidarity for all beyond local and national boundaries. b) To make concrete proposals to contribute to a Human Rights Based Approach to urbanization at the Habitat III Summit. The program and the final declaration would be conceived as input to the process of definition of the New Habitat Agenda. After the forum a delegation of cities, in alliance with the Indonesian Human Rights cities movement will bring the proposals at the Surabaya Preparatory Committee. c) To exchange concrete experiences related to Human Rights mainstreaming in local administration and Human Rights implementation mechanisms at local level. d) To develop knowledge on human rights and particularly in new fields such as environmental rights where local governments can play an important role. e) To strengthen the cooperation between local governments, civil society organizations, national institutions and international and regional human rights protection bodies.

Organizers and attendance

17. The Forum is sponsored by the Metropolitan City of Gwangju as a Co-President of UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (CISDPHR) and the Gwangju Metropolitan Office of Education, and organized by the Gwangju International Center in collaboration with the [Korea Human Rights Foundation](#) (KHRF) and other local civil society organizations, under the guidance of the WHRCF Promotion Committee composed of experts from various sectors and organizations. The Forum is co-sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), and the Asia Pacific Center for Education for International Understanding (APCEIU). The Forum is also supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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18. In the framework of its co-presidency, the Gwangju City Hall will welcome the first meeting of the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, during the WHRCF.
19. About 500 participants both from Korea and abroad, mainly representatives from ‘human rights cities’, human rights NGOs, grassroots community-based organizations, local parliamentarians, academics as well as UN human rights experts are expected to take part in the meeting.

Agenda and Program Structure

20. The meeting will have several types of sessions and activities: Opening and closing ceremonies, a plenary round-table session, thematic workshops, special sessions and human rights tours. Simultaneous interpretation in English, French, Spanish and Korean will be provided in all plenary sessions and one session in each group of parallel sessions at the same time. The meeting will also offer the possibility to participants to organise side events if they request it well in advance (the organiser will provide appropriate spaces but not interpretation). Side events can be organised before or after the main sessions.
21. The plenary session immediately after the opening ceremony will offer presentations on *Building Human Habitat Friendly Cities* via high level representatives from cities, international organisations, civil society and academia from different regions of the world. The presenters will form a round-table to further share their perspectives and experiences among themselves and audiences.
22. There will also be special sessions including a) the annual meeting of the UCLG CISDPHR, b) an experts’ workshop on local government and human rights organized by Korea Human Right Foundation, and c) a networking session among Korean local government representatives.
23. Nine thematic sessions will be organized simultaneously by civil society organizations in Gwangju in cooperation with UCLG CISDPHR and the WHRCF Organizing Committee. Simultaneous translation in English and Korean will be provided while the following themes are addressed: a) State Violence, b) Children and Youth, c) Education Policy, d) Persons with Disability, e) Ageing and older people, f) Environmental Sustainability, g) Gender, h) Social Economy, i) Migrants and Refugees
24. The 2016 WHRCF is a sign of continued commitment of the people and the municipal government of Gwangju as well as an invitation to all like-minded local government officials and human rights advocates to the vision of a Human Rights City for promoting solidarity and cooperation towards a universal culture of human rights beyond national and city boundaries among all urban residents and inhabitants. Gwangju is firmly committed to this vision as it is consistent with the Spirit of Gwangju for the 21st century.

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