

BARCELONA POLICY DIA LOGUE ON THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

UCLG wave of action on housing and the Shift movement

November 3, 2017

The **Policy dialogue on the Right to Housing** took place on the occasion of the Barcelona meeting for the Right to Housing (2-3 November), coordinated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) under the lead of its Co-President and Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau, as well as with the support of its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights. It was held in the framework of "[The Shift](#)", a movement launched in Habitat III Conference by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, to claim housing as a human right and not a commodity; as well as UCLG's "[Wave of action on the Right to Housing](#)", a coordination effort of the "municipalist" global network towards the achievement of global agendas from the bottom-up. The meeting was held by the City Council of Barcelona in partnership with UCLG, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate housing.

CITIES FOR THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

Local commitment to lead "the Shift" towards the Right to Housing

A public event opened the dialogue, counting with **Ada Colau**, Mayor of Barcelona; **Leilani Farha**, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing; **Parks Tau**, President of UCLG; **Lorena Zárate**, President of Habitat International Coalition (HIC); as well as **Silvana Pissano**, Housing Director of Montevideo, and **David Prout**, Vice-President on Housing and Urban Land of Plaine Commune.

Mayor Colau pointed out the issue of housing as a major challenge for global cities like Barcelona, which major challenges such as speculation, gentrification and mass tourism lacking an adequate regulatory framework at the national level and a scarce social housing stock (up to 2% in the city of Barcelona). She also noted how 38 properties belong to speculative investments funds that put pressure on the neighbours to leave their homes. The opacity of these funds and the way these properties are managed from outside Barcelona affects people's essential Right to Housing and represents a clear threat to democracy. Mayor Colau recalled her background as an activist for the Right to Housing and the commitment of her City Council to work with civil society in making this Right a reality through programmes of social housing, improving the life conditions of Barcelona inhabitants. The Mayor showed her determination to "*put an end to privileges and change the regulatory framework*". In order to secure "*the Right to Housing as a key component of the Right to the City*", she emphasised the need to "*share strategies in order to do much more*".

This call was embraced by **President Parks Tau**, who noted that, given that housing is a political priority for citizens all around the world, this should be reflected in the work of local and national governments. Considering it as a key component of the Right to the City, he defended the Right to Housing as a priority for UCLG in the framework of Bogotá's Commitment. He thus recalled how "*people can only play an active role in the social, cultural and political life of their cities if they know that they'll have a roof over their head tonight, tomorrow and next year*". That's why UCLG has been pushing, in partnership with civil society, for the Right to the City in international fora. The President also stressed how, "*in order to defend the Right to Housing, we must also defend the basic tools of local governance: decentralization and financing*". In this regard, he remarked how, too often, cities with the political will to address this challenge lack the tools to do so. That's why UCLG's calls for increased local competencies and financing for local governments "*tools that are directly related to concrete policy goals, whether they are guaranteeing the Right to Housing or providing other vital*

services". President Parks Tau concluded by mentioning how *"it is clear that guaranteeing the Right to Housing is a shared local-global responsibility, and that UCLG is determined to make the Shift"*.

This local governments' call was especially welcomed by **UN Special Rapporteur Farha**, who evoked their proximity with citizens' everyday life as a key aspect for guaranteeing the success of "The Shift" (remarking how *"UCLG is crucial to the Shift"*). She recalled that the Shift is a global movement aimed at tackling housing financialization and to ensure housing as a right and a social good, recalling that 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing conditions at global level.

As President of Habitat International Coalition and on behalf of the Global Platform for the Right to the City, **Ms. Zárate** emphasised the need to change the way housing policies have been managed in the preceding two decades, based on speculation and financialization and devised only for profit. There is an urgent need to change the paradigm, not only focusing on "affordability" but thinking housing as a right in order to make the private sector accountable. Multi-stakeholder alliances are especially necessary in this regard.

Representing Plaine Commune, a Co-President territory of UCLG's Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, **Deputy Mayor Proult** insisted on the fact that urban inequalities and social cohesion are at stake when talking about the Right to Housing. Representing the municipality of Montevideo, **Housing Directress Pissano** showcased the need to share strategies to bring back housing as a right and to ensure a democratic management over urbanization.

POLICY ROUNDTABLE ON HOUSING

Magali Fricaudet, coordinator of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, recalled UCLG's advocacy work for the Right to the City and the Right to Housing throughout the process of Habitat III, in collaboration with the [Global Platform for the Right to the City](#) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Looking at the New Urban Agenda through a local, human rights perspective, UCLG joined the initiative of the Special Rapporteur, *"The Shift"*, a global movement to reclaim the Right to housing. After several preparatory efforts in this regard and a meeting [held in Ottawa](#), it is now a priority to concretize a proposal for local governments towards UCLG World Council's political debates.

Challenges for local governments in guaranteeing the Right to Housing

Miloon Kothari, Senior Advisor at the MIT Displacement Research Action Network and **David Satterthwaite**, senior fellow at IIED, shared the outcomes of the Expert Group Meeting on Housing policy organized the day before as a contribution to UCLG's GOLD V Report. This report will highlight initiatives of local governments to "localize" SDGs and, in particular, the 11th (on inclusive cities). One of its chapters will therefore look at the role of local governments to promote access to adequate housing. It should be borne in mind that this report is in line with UCLG's Wave of action on housing, reflecting the main trends on global housing policies and their local impacts, such as forced evictions, gentrification or the financialization of housing. **Mr. Kothari** already pointed out to fostering social inclusion and community participation, as community empowerment initiatives against evictions, housing cooperatives, effective multi-level coordination or urban planning mechanisms. Mr. Kothari recalled how the Shift is in line with global agendas, chiefly SDG 11.1, seeking to ensure access to adequate housing for all by 2030.

As summarized by **Mr. Satterthwaite**, experts agreed on several topics regarding housing policy:

1. The need for **effective decentralization and strong local partnerships**, showing how effective solutions on housing can be delivered when counting with city dwellers participation and recognizing how important their representative organizations are;
2. The importance of **affordable housing**, focusing on how to reduce the cost of housing through urban land management, planning or subsidies;
3. The need for strong **social housing programmes targeting the most vulnerable first** and monitoring their impact in the light of fulfilling the Right to Housing;
4. The “**Co-production of the Right to Housing**” and its link with the Right to the City, understanding housing as an enabler of access to services and improved public spaces;
5. The importance of mobilizing and gathering supports to **upgrade slums**;
6. The key role of **community organizations** and grassroots movements in issues such as data collection and mining in regards to improving informal settlements;
7. The need to secure **urban resilience**;
8. The importance of **adequate funding**, putting more attention on local communities as well as shifting multilateral funds to specific needs such as slums upgrading, building resilience or addressing overall city needs in terms of services or public space;
9. GOLD should be focused on **providing compelling examples**, encouraging cities to develop their own housing policy and demonstrating how they contribute to SDG 11; it is through powerful examples that principles for action and learning dynamics can be established.
10. The meeting noted the **importance of local-global partnerships** between organizations such as UCLG and civil society movements, an alliance driving policy and change alike to promote the Right to Housing and the Right to the City.
11. **Long-term vision and continuity** in housing policies should be strongly promoted.

A global movement to reclaim the Right to Housing: Make the Shift

Mr. Ghazi, Urbanization and Land Rights Officer at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), recalled how the Right to Housing is based on ratified obligations that must be implemented. Current approaches to housing are not ensuring access for all, neither properly linking housing to other areas such as livelihood or transportation. He noted how a Human Rights approach would shift this situation, recalling the work of the UN Human Rights system to turn the Right to Housing into a reality: guidelines on security of tenure, prevention of forced evictions, toolkits, methodologies and indicators to assess progress. The OHCHR supports the inclusion of local governments in international human rights discussions, to assess what means do they need to protect and defend Human Rights and to continue to define what they are accountable for.

The Deputy High Commissioner at OHCHR, **Kate Gilmore** shared through a video allocution her commitment to “Bring Human Rights home”, in cities and urban settlements. She assumed her commitment with The Shift to defend housing as a fundamental human right and not a commodity. The Shift seeks to humanize the idea of habitat in the framework of a process of growing urbanization, ensuring everyone’s access to housing on a threefold approach:

1. Through enhancing communities’ participation by including city dwellers’ voices and contributions into decision-making and planning. In this regard, she recalled how Human Rights aim at empowering people and bringing them to the centre of public discussions.
2. By fostering equality and non-discrimination in urban settlements. Urban spaces are reproducing and generating inequalities; it is then necessary to focus on ending urban discriminations by making cities inclusive, welcoming, pluralistic and diverse.
3. Considering accountability as a key element for developing the first two goals: in public budgeting, planning and into the establishment of priorities, as well as in promoting transparency and the rule of law in public decisions.

Ms. Gilmore concluded by reaffirming the OHCHR's commitment to the Shift, as well as in engaging with the world's mayors in bringing together the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in people's everyday lives, home, on the occasion of its 70th anniversary.

UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Farha further developed the need to bring Human Rights home, stressing the urgent need to immediately tackle the housing crisis. In her call to make the world respond differently, she defends the Shift as a platform for engaging stakeholders to do it together: civil society, governments, human rights institutions, private sector, multilateral organizations and grassroots movements. Its goals could be structured into three parts:

1. **To provide a platform for uniting and supporting organizations** working on the Right to Housing. *"If we have a global movement, we need to bring together the actions of its stakeholders and maximise their impact"*. It is important to ensure the use of a common language, and to be aware that "we are shifting" towards the Human Rights approach.
2. **To change the conversation.** The Shift aims at raising communication tools, organizing collaborative events and promoting existing initiatives among stakeholders. She insisted on the fact that human rights are a way of governing, of running markets or doing business (corporations must be held accountable). They are not lofty principles but practical guidelines on how to develop cities. Local governments should know these standards and what their obligations under international law are.
3. **To encourage local governments to take action.** *"If you are a city and you want to do something related to human rights on housing, you will have an international community of like-minded people and institutions supporting you"* In this regard, the Shift would propose to harness the current tools to protect, fulfil and promote the right to housing at local level.

Barcelona's Manifesto for the Right to Housing to engage local governments

The **housing expert David Bravo** introduced afterwards the "Barcelona manifesto", a document calling for a "*municipalist network*" to defend the Right to Housing and the Right to the City as a way to contribute to The Shift. Since this is still a draft, cities can nourish and promote it together. The Manifesto is divided into three main areas: (i) **Subsidiary decentralization**, with more competences and means for local governments (ii) "**Municipalist**" **solidarity**, where cities bring forward their demands together (iii) and **social co-production** of cities. The Manifesto has 10 principles:

1. **Exchanging best practices and tools** seeking to universalize successful practices;
2. **Fostering forums for reflection and participation** to draw global interest towards housing;
3. Calling for further **decentralization with more resources and means**;
4. **Tackling global markets bad practices** (e.g. financial globalization, digital economy);
5. **Fostering metropolitan solidarity**, where cities or local governments do not compete but base their relationship on solidarity to drive forward these goals;
6. **Planning mixed and compact cities** through inclusive and sustainability urban planning;
7. **Regulating property and real estate market**, with common good-based housing policies;
8. **Strengthening public housing in a qualitative way**, promoting social diversity, small or medium-sized estate developers or housing and neighbourhood improvement programmes;
9. **Encouraging cooperatives and the non-lucrative private sector**;
10. **Governing this network in an inclusive and democratic way** to include more cities

Deputy Mayor **David Prout** notes that Plaine Commune is already engaged in many of the goals of the Manifesto. He highlights how important it is to focus on developing a social housing policy not only for the poorest, but considering it as a universal policy. Securing financial means to develop policy is also important. He notes how the situation in France is extremely diverse, with 3 million people inappropriately housed and many living in a wide range of inadequate conditions (*fragilité de*

logement). Our understanding changes whether if we consider only the most excluded or the wider range of people that have difficult access to this universal human right. He believes that the most excluded should be present in the debate, and that more efforts should be devoted in raising awareness on the subject, since housing is still not receiving all the necessary attention.

Plaine Commune Housing Director **Axel Lecomte**, director of housing at Plaine Commune, welcomed the text, insisting on the need to properly link the Right to Housing and the Right to polycentric metropolitan areas. In this regard, it is crucial to secure that the benefits of public investments are not captured by private sector through the increase of the value of the houses, to develop social housing into high value locations as well, and to link the Right to Housing with the Right to centrality.

Montevideo's Housing Directress **Silvana Pissano** also received positively the Manifesto, given that it tackles many elements related to Montevideo's priorities. She believes it should provide specific mechanisms and focus on the most vulnerable populations. Montevideo is interested in working for the Right to remain, against gentrification and speculation and to have a Human Rights-based approach on forced evictions. Montevideo is joining the Manifesto and will defend its vision during UCLG's World Council.

Ms. Aldanas, Policy Officer at FEANTSA, welcomed the initiative as well. She noted it should take in consideration homeless people by stressing that this problem should not only be seen through a social services-based perspective, but through a housing rights one. A specific mention should be made to the criminalization of homeless people and to their free enjoyment of public space.

Mr. Sales, expert on homelessness at the Barcelona City Council, considered "*homelessness as the iceberg's peak of residential exclusion*". Rental prices increase is not only affecting the Right to remain in the city of a major part of city dwellers, but also the residential stabilization of homeless populations at large. Homelessness is not a failure of social services; we must shift from a social services-based approach to one that considers housing as an essential right. We must work on integrating discourses and see housing as a shared for the vast majority, which is concretized into homelessness in its extreme situation.

Ms. Boonyabancha, from the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, remarked UCLG as a key institution to advance the Right to the City: the Right of city dwellers to co-create urban spaces. Housing policy should foster cities and people to work together on a holistic vision of housing, defined as a social system, a social community of people and its access to the city. Land and finances are an essential element; we should find a way to adequately catering them to people to develop their own projects.

Mr. Saule, from Instituto Polis and the Global Platform for the Right to the City, remarked the important role of local governments for defining what the vision and perspective of cities are. He considered as essential to work in improving the "educative dimension" of Rights. He also recalled the importance of linking this agenda with researchers. A more precise reference to what a compact city is still needed, as well as to best consider the role of peripheral and intermediate cities.

Mr. Ghazi showcased several concrete practices to defend human rights at the local level, such having a local ombudsman to improve accountability or establishing monitoring mechanisms.

Mr. Gardner, from South Africa's [CAHF](#) considered that although this document might be relevant for many cities, it may fail to reach other parts of the world where housing markets are still being developed and there is a great need for housing due to demographic growth.

Mr. Kothari noted how messages related to reaching the most vulnerable first and leaving no one behind should be included, as well as to have as goals the end of marginalization for homeless, minorities and migrants, guaranteeing security of tenure. Already existing international tools for securing the Right to the City and Human Rights should be included as well.

Mr. Bravo noted that although our cities are diverse, human rights are universal. Welcoming the inputs, through UCLG and Make the Shift we will advance this document in a collaborative way.

Ms. Farha welcomed the Manifesto and believes this should be a mechanism for cities to join to the Shift. *“We have to find a way for this kind of initiatives to not be watered down”*. In wondering how to move forward the movement, she considered as essential to recruit more people for The Shift at all levels, and to include more institutions as well, using international events to draw attention to Shift, such as Kuala Lumpur’s World Urban Forum (February 2018) or the High-Level Political Forum on SDG 11 (July 2018).

Ms. Saiz closed the event emphasising how UCLG is a global movement with a solid background and with energy to move commitments forward even with few resources. She noted how *“we have to drive forward The Shift both towards the international community as well as inwards, changing views, culture, practices and narratives of our own members”* being aware how *“still few of us are truly committed to this initiative by now, yet there’s a long way to go and we can have a major outreach if we are able to explain this campaign thanks to committed cities like our co-president Barcelona”*. She concluded by considering how *“a document like this Manifesto will trigger a lot of discussions in our organization, not always commitment, but things might change in the long term”*.