



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

## **GPR2C contribution to the Draft Guidelines proposed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Ms. Leilani Farha**

As an international network of civil society and local governments organizations<sup>1</sup> committed to political action and social change through the promotion, defense and fulfillment of the Right to the City at all levels, we would like to express our gratitude on the possibility of addressing you regarding the proposed Draft Guidelines on the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing. At this moment of global urban and housing crisis, it is an excellent initiative and valuable opportunity to deepen the dialogue on the relationship among the right to adequate housing and the right to the city.

At the core of the Draft Guidelines resides the idea of promoting a paradigm shift, framing housing as a right and not a commodity anymore. This very powerful idea embraces social claims that for decades have been arguing that are many more dimensions to housing than its economic value. Housing means dignity, it is not simply an economic asset.

However, we believe this idea would benefit from the connection with the claims embedded into the right to the city framework, which clearly states that not only housing, but actually cities, villages and all human settlements should be seen as common goods. Housing usually is directly connected, and sometimes even submitted, to the sociopolitical and economic forces that drive urban and rural development. To accomplish the shift from commodity to right, we have to change the entire production system of cities and human settlements, meaning guaranteeing the democratization of access to land, fulfilling the social functions of cities, land and property, ensuring people's meaningful participation in decision-making and implementation of public policies, among other core elements of the Right to the City.

Therefore, the guidelines could mention, or at least acknowledge the existence, of the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, transform, govern and enjoy cities, towns and human settlements that are just, inclusive, safe, sustainable and democratic, defined as common goods for enjoying life with dignity and peace.

We are fully aware of reservations from states, multilateral and international organizations to acknowledge the existence of the Right to the City. This has happened before with all human rights during these past centuries, which were codified only after decades of social claims. The Right to the City faces today the same challenge these other rights faced before, and many people, movements,

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the main organizations of the GPR2C include ActionAid, Habitat for Humanity, Habitat International Coalition (HIC), Huairou Commission, Intercontinental Network for Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), Polis Institute, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), StreetNet, TECHO, Women in Cities International (WICI), Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), among others.



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organizations and social mobilizations are trying to change this throughout the world. At some point, states, multilateral and international organizations will not be able to ignore this claim anymore.

Some important steps were already taken in this direction and they are extremely important in order to justify the inclusion of the Right to the City in the Draft Guidelines. Besides different UN-Habitat documents and initiatives on the issue, as the 2010 World Urban Forum theme on the Right to the City, the New Urban Agenda itself acknowledge its existence in the “Shared Vision” as it follows:

*We share a vision of cities for all, 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. We note the efforts of some national and local governments to enshrine this vision, referred to as “right to the city”, in their legislation, political declarations and charters.*

Not only the states expressly refer to the Right to the City, but they also included many of its different components throughout the document, such as the social functions of cities, land and property, political participation in urban and territorial public policies, inclusive economies, gender equality, among others directly connected with the production of housing.

Safe, inclusive, accessible and affordable housing cannot be achieved without cities and humans settlements free of discrimination; gender-responsive and with inclusive citizenship, that embrace minorities and ethnic, racial, sexual, cultural and functional diversity; with enhanced political participation; that fulfill its social function, with quality of public space, diverse and inclusive economies, and inclusive rural-urban linkages.

The Right to the City brings a new and necessary perspective for the implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing. Over the last decades, the Right to the City has been a viable alternative and a claim with which to respond to some of the most pressing challenges of our time: social injustice, inequality, exclusion, dispossession, spatial segregation, discrimination of all kinds, destruction and privatization of the commons and environmental degradation. It brings a human rights perspective and allows for the fulfillment of economic, social and cultural rights in each specific territory. Right to the City and the Right to Adequate Housing are closely interdependent, and they must be addressed together, complementing and strengthening each other.

With this in mind, we would like to submit to your appreciation the following text suggestions:

### **Introduction**

5. *This raises unique challenges for the implementation of the right to housing. Tinkering around the edges of an unsustainable model of economic development will not work. The right to housing must be implemented in a manner that changes the way housing is currently conceived,*



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valued, produced and regulated. It has to be understood and implemented within a wider territorial approach, focused on changing urban and territorial development patterns as claimed by the Right to the City, in order to achieve just, inclusive, safe, sustainable and democratic cities, villages and human settlements.

6. There are grounds for hope that this is possible. Civil society and Governments, from local to national, are now realizing that the housing crisis is in fact a human rights crisis and that to address it, housing must be reclaimed as a human right and has to be addressed in conjunction with the realization of other rights, such as the right to the city. Many cities have joined forces in a global movement initiated by the Special Rapporteur in conjunction with the OHCHR and United Cities and Local Governments, committing to a fundamental shift in order to treat housing as a human right rather than as a commodity. Neighbourhoods and communities around the world are organizing against development, touristification and speculation where it threatens their right to adequate housing. Local governments are aware and willing to face those challenges as well, as manifested in the Municipalist Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City.

#### **Guideline No. 2**

**Design, implement and regularly monitor comprehensive strategies for the realization of the right to housing**

##### **Implementation measures:**

b) Also, housing strategies should consider the realization of the social and environmental function of the land, providing the population with socially and environmentally responsible uses in integrated territories, with access to quality services and infrastructure, as well as public spaces associated with housing. In this sense, proper location should be an element of accountability in both legal recognition and housing policy formulation.

#### **Guideline No. 12**

**Upgrade informal settlements incorporating a human rights-based approach**

53. Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, States have committed to “upgrade slums” and ensure adequate housing for all (target 11.1). As indicated by the CESCR, a State is in prima facie violation of the right to adequate housing if a significant portion of the population does not have access to basic shelter and housing. Instead of “eradicating” informal settlements and displacing residents to remote locations, States should engage with residents of informal settlements to build on their capacities, improve conditions and keep communities intact. Informal settlements have to be seen as part of the cities where they are located, for both legal and urbanistic purposes. Therefore, the realization of the right to adequate housing in this circumstance is directly connected to the realization of their right to the city, as stated by the New Urban Agenda. It is not possible to



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*improve live conditions of those settlements without taking into account their relation with the rest of the city territory.*

Once again, we would like to congratulate the Special Rapporteur on this initiative and offer our support and cooperation.

Best regards,  
Global Platform for the Right to the City