



# Habitat International Coalition: Networked practices, knowledges and pedagogies for translocal housing activism

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## **Abstract**

How do global coalitions of civil society, non-governmental and community-based organisations, social movements and academics, make visible, defend and produce habitat rights? This conversation with the President of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), Adriana Allen, examines HIC's perspectives on the practices, knowledges and pedagogies for translocal housing activism through reflections structured along several themes. These include understanding the horizontal democratic practices of working as a 'network of networks', with particular focus on how translocality can go beyond international mobility. The discussion also addresses the struggle for recognition and for pursuing epistemic justice, highlighting caveats and potentials of knowledge co-production and popular pedagogies; and the diversity of understandings of housing (including, radical housing) which the Coalition nurtures and reconciles. The conversation highlights the value of foregrounding an explicitly rights-based housing agenda, which has been continuously nurtured over the past 40+ years of HIC's work on the social production of habitat.

## **Keywords**

Networks, habitat rights, translocal activism, epistemic justice, knowledge co-production

Adriana Allen, Camila Cociña and Julia Wesely work together in the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, UK. KNOW conducts research and capacity-building in a consortium of 13 research institutions and partners in 12 cities across Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia.<sup>1</sup>

Adriana is also the current President of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), a role for which she was elected in December 2019 for the period 2019-2023. The following text is based on a conversation, where Camila and Julia reflect with Adriana on HIC's approach to develop and nurture networked practices, knowledges and pedagogies for translocal housing activism.

**Julia Wesely:** The Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is a global alliance constituted of over 400 members, friends and allies who work collectively for greater social justice, gender equality and environmental sustainability. HIC has worked for more than 40 years towards the realisation of human rights related to housing and land, functioning not only as a network of civil society organisations, academics, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), but as a 'network of networks'. Along with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) and others, HIC is mobilising its collective muscle from local to global scales to make visible, defend and produce habitat rights.

Adriana, considering the huge geographical, cultural, and social diversity of HIC's constituency, what do you consider the qualities and principles underpinning the Coalition's networked way of working? How are they operationalised in housing struggles?

**Adriana Allen:** It might be useful to differentiate between what being a 'network' and a 'coalition' means in practice. Put simply, most coalitions operate in a networked way but not all networks are coalitions. The notion of a coalition denotes in my view a strong common political sense, the sense of fighting against common struggles, but also of coalescing or growing together through collaborative action.

HIC is in fact a coalition that works as a network of networks but with very particular attributes or qualities. Central to these qualities is its strong sense of a common political purpose: the realisation of habitat rights. HIC's work focuses on 'commoning' in *what we do* and *how we go about it*. By this, I mean that HIC embraces simultaneously the practice of 'doing commoning' and 'becoming in common'. The first refers to HIC's struggles for the collectivisation of housing and land to protect their social function. It also implies the adoption of generative processes of collectivising ways of relating, to counter various forms of exploitative and subordinating relations propelled by colonialism, neoliberalism and patriarchy. Commoning relations are deeply intersectional in HIC, as the work of the

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, visit KNOW website [www.urban-know.com](http://www.urban-know.com)

Coalition permeates social relations of difference such as gender, race, ethnicity, caste, age, disability, among others, which together shape collective capacities and power.

A second distinctive quality of HIC, of 'becoming in common', refers to its highly geographically distributed and horizontal network, with its horizontality expressed through the direct democratic practices that have held the Coalition together across the so-called global south and north. As such, HIC relies on translocal empowerment processes to expand the capacities of its members to effect transformative change at multiple scales. A critical question here is to ensure that translocal empowerment works through 'bubbling up' processes of co-learning, exchange, action, advocacy and communication. This is not easy, as it requires refraining from ventriloquising grassroots voices to facilitate instead the travelling of such voices across different advocacy scales.

More precisely, what I term bubbling up – for lack of a better term – refers to the carving of spaces in the international arena for local experiences to speak directly in such spaces. The collective drafting of political manifestos is one among many other methods we use in this regard, with our recent *Habitat Voices Campaign*<sup>2</sup> being an example of how we approach bubbling up processes. Throughout these processes, something else emerges from the dynamics of rubbing off on each other's perspectives. For instance, I have often witnessed how feminist groups within the Coalition impact others with sharp questions on how patriarchal practices are reproduced through the everyday. Or similarly, indigenous groups pushing for different ways to re-problematise the way we talk about urban life or nature. In a nutshell, the translocal vocation and methodological approach of HIC lives through the Coalition's assembling of political ways of doing, learning, knowing, mobilising, framing, acting and advocating.

**Camila Cociña:** This is extremely interesting. By this account, the networked nature of HIC is not only about exchanging and fostering ideas and strategies, but also about allowing a political process of learning, by promoting spaces in which ideas are mutually challenged or, in your own words, rubbed off. HIC's practices seem to allow groups with a common political purpose and diverse approaches to learn from each other, complementing and perhaps even problematising each other's perspectives. For the Coalition, I imagine, this openness can bring about some challenges related to the autonomy of each member, and also to the construction of horizontal democratic practices that allow potential tensions to emerge in productive ways. I wonder if this is somehow tested in the capacity of the Coalition to produce common rights-based approaches and collective strategies. Can you expand your reflections on how the networked, diverse nature of HIC's members has shaped its collective rights-based strategies of housing resistance and advocacy?

**Adriana:** From its inception over 40 years ago, HIC has worked to ensure that everyone has a place in which to live in peace and dignity, fighting for the recognition, protection and implementation of the rights to housing, land and all human rights related to habitat. A rights-based approach has been, and continues to be, central to what HIC does. The

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Habitat Voices Campaign see <https://www.hic-net.org/habitat-voices-campaign/>

networked nature of the Coalition has been crucial in the evolution of strategies over time, not only to change tactics but also to embrace the multiple dimensions that underpin habitat rights and, of course, to expand the very notion of ‘housing rights’. This goes all the way from the early reframing of ‘housing as a verb, not a thing’ popularised by John Turner in the 1960s, to the articulation over time of multiple and new voices and perspectives on the questions of ‘whose and what housing rights’.

Think, for instance, about the expansion of the housing cooperativism movement driven by the *Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua* (FUCVAM) well beyond Uruguay and even Latin America, or the emergence of the Mortgage-Affected People (PAH) in Spain in the aftermath of the housing emergency unleashed by the 2008 global financial crisis. Throughout these and many other experiences, we see a continuous collective push to expand and rethink institutional housing-related boundaries. This push entails producing, exchanging and enacting political practices and subjectivities – new ways of saying, being, doing and disrupting, of becoming visible in the process and reclaiming agency – all of which catalyse through highly networked processes.

**Camila:** This takes us again to questions of ‘translocality’, and the ways in which the Coalition embraces networked processes across multiple scales and geographies to ensure habitat rights.

**Adriana:** Importantly, HIC means by translocality not just the travelling of knowledge, but the knowledge production process embedded in the travel – encompassing all: questions, theories, evidence, analysis and actionable knowledge. Such travelling also brings challenges and opportunities to tackle epistemic injustices. We know that translocality is not politically neutral, meaning that knowledge travels within uneven networks of power. Think, for instance, about the propagation of ‘best’ and even ‘good’ practices and solutions that often feed the action vocabulary of urban planners and policy-makers. A central problem with these celebrated practices is that they often emanate from a few centralised nodes and refer to a handful of cities worldwide, the ‘poster children’ in urban planning.

A further problem is that more often than not, these poster children experiences are exceptional, but portrayed as what all cities should become. With this, I mean that, in many instances, urban knowledge travels by inverting ‘exceptionality’ and ‘normality’. The poster children might vaguely talk to the reality of thousands of cities and human settlements, where – say investments in bus rapid transit systems (BRT) – are unlikely to address everyday mobility problems, or where land tenure might operate outside the public-private spectrum, to encompass instead hybrid forms of customary, statutory and private land management. Furthermore, best and good practices or urban ‘solutions’ to wicked problems are often sanitised accounts that remove any reference to the political economy under which they were activated, or their unintended consequences. For instance, when scrutinised, many celebrated poster children experiences have resulted in eco-gentrification and displacement and, in some cases, racial banishment. We cannot just treat unintended consequences as surprises; we have to plan from the onset how to avoid them.

In this sense, HIC works through a form of translocal coalescing that aims to invert mainstream discourses on exceptionality and normality, on inequality and difference, on minorities and majorities. The everyday violation of housing rights is not an exceptional process that affects minorities in a disproportional way, it affects majorities! We work on changing the default mainstream options that portray the world as made of white straight middle-class men and ‘others’. We contest ‘residual’ categorisations and mirrors that reproduce internalised and externalised forms of oppression, exclusion and subordination.

**Camila:** The discussions about ‘whose housing rights’, ‘reclaiming agency’ and ‘inverting mainstream discourses’ that you describe, are at the core of positioning *recognition* aspects as key elements of social justice. In a recent reflection as part of the *Habitat Voices Campaign*, you mentioned how the current Covid-19 crisis has revealed that we have been under some kind of ‘social anaesthesia’ for several years, where we constantly witness processes of exclusion that affect the majority of people who are often labelled as ‘minorities’. I really like the way you expressed these contradictions and problematised the notions of minority and majority. It also made me think of similar discussions related, for example, to race, where terms such as ‘people of the global majority’ have been raised as a way to recognise non-white people’s identities beyond the notion of ‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘people of colour’, which are described in relation to whiteness. Being able to remove that social anaesthesia and recognise the conditions and struggles of the *majority* of people, requires to challenge the way in which we produce and mobilise knowledge, bringing questions of epistemic justice to the forefront, and challenging *whose* and *what* knowledge is recognised, mobilised and valued. In the case of housing, it is about re-centering histories and struggles, and the ways we describe and understand the production of habitat. Can you reflect on the challenges of the recognition of knowledges related to the label of ‘minorities’? From HIC’s perspective, what do you think is the role of rights-based translocal networks in disrupting that social anaesthesia?

**Adriana:** By ‘social anaesthesia’ I refer to the pervasive social constructs and biases that normalise injustices, not only making people unable to recognise them as they unfold in front of our eyes on a day-to-day basis, but also through the feeling that, even if we see them, there is little we can do. I call the latter a ‘political abstinence syndrome’. It is not enough to say: ‘I am not a racist or misogynist’, or: ‘it hurts to see so many people living on the streets, but there is nothing I can do’. People commonly feel that it is possible not to be political, but ‘no action’ is also a political statement. The problem lies in a social construction that perpetuates the fantasy that you can opt out from being political.

HIC – like other rights-based networks – plays a key role in challenging and disrupting these assumptions. To give a recent example, through the Covid-19 crisis, we have also witnessed an unqualified perception of the State as protector of the lives of all citizens. We have seen a romanticised view of Covid-19 quarantines, where ‘home’ is presumed to be a safe place, and ‘people’ are portrayed as owners of their bodies and times, of their decisions on production and reproduction, on collective action and political participation; in short, as citizens in full capacity to exercise their rights. These assumptions, deeply

rooted in our societies and government systems, continue to have a disproportionate impact on typically invisible social groups: the poor, informal workers, migrants, indigenous peoples, and, to a large extent, women who live at the intersection of multiple social identities.

Our emphasis throughout the Covid-19 crisis has been to contest the widespread notion that we face an ‘unexpected crisis’ that requires temporary humanitarian responses, and to reframe the context in which we live. Tackling homelessness or halting evictions are not just actions required as momentary preventative health measures to contain the spread of the virus; they are fundamental ways to confront long-running human rights violations. Housing cannot be treated as a commodity, not just because of the pandemic and the call to ‘stay at home’, but because housing security is a fundamental right to be protected before, during and beyond the pandemic. Over the last few months, we have mobilised this message in many ways and through multiple fora; an example of which is our *Habitat Voices Manifesto*<sup>3</sup>, which calls for profound redistribution, (different but equal) recognition and parity of political participation.

**Julia:** We know about the challenges of disrupting this social anaesthesia (or, rather, multiple social anaesthesias) and about the necessity and urgency to produce political practices and subjectivities in a collective, collaborative and networked manner. It is clear that we need to go beyond diagnosing, de-normalising and re-framing towards producing actionable knowledge that is responding to the epistemic injustices which you outlined above. Now, one of the suggested pathways towards epistemic justice in networks such as HIC, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), which has gained increasing prominence over the past years, is through deepened and expanded knowledge co-production. If we define these co-production processes as collaborative efforts which embrace an epistemology and ethos of ‘knowledge production born of the confrontation and juxtaposition of multiple ways of living, working and seeing’ (Woodcraft et al., 2020, p.290), where do you see caveats and potentials of practising translocal knowledge co-production in HIC?

**Adriana:** As knowledge co-production has become another buzzword, I guess a critical challenge is to remain watchful of how we practise it, and to remain mindful of the political and ethical responsibilities and commitments that come with such practice. In academic circles, it is now common to see adherence to the principles of co-producing knowledge, but this can still mask extractive and unequal practices, where ‘overseas partners’ are approached as local ‘gatekeepers’, and concrete contexts as ‘case studies’ or ‘empirical heavens’ where data is collected and then articulated and theorised from elsewhere. This takes us to reflect on the focus and locus of knowledge co-production.

I recall a story shared by Gautam Bhan, a remarkable housing and LGBTQ+ rights activist based at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) in Bangalore. While he was pursuing his doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley, one of his

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<sup>3</sup> HIC Habitat Voices Manifesto can be accessed at: <https://www.hic-net.org/habitat-voices-our-manifesto/>. To support the manifesto, visit: <https://bit.ly/habitatvoices>

tutors used to tell him: ‘from New York you theorise, and from New Delhi you give testimony’. This epistemological and subordinating division of labour has been naturalised not just across the global north and south. It also works through elites within these broad geopolitical domains, building an artificial separation between those who produce knowledge and theory, and subaltern voices who give testimony. Knowledge co-production refers us to a whole chain of practices: from the articulation of the questions that are asked, the different forms of knowledge that are accepted as valid or invalid, the engagement in exploring such questions on the ground, the assemblage, analysis and theorisation of it, and, of course, the ways in which knowledge is actively deployed. All of these steps are plagued with ethical challenges and uneven power dynamics.

As discussed before, HIC embraces an implicit epistemological project, through which knowledge and testimony are articulated as one. Those struggling for their habitat rights are not a ‘case study’. Rather, their knowledges and experiences are the basis for knowing and acting. If we think about Miranda Fricker’s conceptualisation of epistemic injustice and her useful distinction between testimonial and hermeneutical or interpretative injustice (Fricker, 2007), HIC’s implicit pedagogies actively tackle both dimensions. For instance, there are many stories of women who exercise strategies to fight for the right to housing and the defence of the territory, who demand climate justice and the right to the city, but how many of them are widely known? HIC’s Campaign on Women as Protagonists<sup>4</sup> in the construction and affirmation of our habitat rights, seeks to make visible and celebrate their experiences and work. Similar initiatives such as the campaign of the *Red Mujeres y Habitat - America Latina y Caribe* on ‘Women Building Movements from Diversities’<sup>5</sup>, have sought over the last year to change interpretative mainstream framings of the city by propelling a feminist regional agenda in the public sphere. In these examples, testimonial injustices are challenged through the reciprocal recognition of those who are otherwise rendered invisible (such as through the multiple faces, voices and stories of women as protagonists in claiming and building habitat rights); while hermeneutical injustices are challenged by the way in which a feminist reframing of how cities work offers a refreshing interpretative lens to tackle gender inequality and advance real parity of political participation.

**Julia:** In a recent talk on Habitat Day, you argued that HIC’s work unfolds around five key verbs: 1. to *report/denounce* violations of habitat rights (*denunciar*), 2. to *make visible* the voices and claims of those who are un-, mal- or mis-recognised (*visibilisar*), 3. to *celebrate* HIC’s achievements, which contributes to strengthening recognition within the network and beyond (*celebrar*); 4. to *co-learn* HIC’s principles and practices for the social production of habitat (*aprender*), and 5. to *reframe* institutional and conceptual debates (*cambiar*).

<sup>4</sup> For more information visit: <https://www.hic-net.org/feminist-and-gender-perspectives-in-the-construction-and-affirmation-of-our-habitat-rights/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.redmujer.org.ar/proyectos>

Our ongoing research as part of the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme is anchored in the pedagogic function of HIC, which is closely aligned with the notion of co-learning as an integral and transversal element across all five verbs. What I find interesting – reflecting on your use of verbs rather than nouns to describe HIC pedagogies – is that many members of HIC Latin America (HIC-AL) refer to HIC as a School of ‘*saberes*’ and ‘*haceres*’, meaning that collectively constructing ways of knowing (*saberes*) is inseparable from constructing ways of doing (*haceres*).

Considering HIC’s principles of autonomy, horizontal relations, and the political vocation of collectivising action, being a ‘School’ then translates into a multifaceted pedagogic repertoire of *saberes* and *haceres*. The ‘movement as a school’, as Paulo Freire (1991) coined it, is not so much one institution (i.e., the school of the movement), but an assemblage of pedagogic practices that can take the shape of seminars, internships, diploma courses, schools for community leaders, forums and discussions, which are held together by the principles which the coalition commits to. As part of KNOW, we started this research with HIC-AL based on the interest of the Coalition to capture, consolidate and interrogate its pedagogic repertoire. Our research started by focusing on understanding HIC as an *Escuela de Urbanismo Popular* (School of Popular Urbanism). However, the current shift to remote working has also brought momentum to promote *co-learning* and *re-frame* conversations about pedagogic practices not only in Latin America, but globally.

How do these pedagogic practices manifest beyond Latin America? Can you give us an example of how ‘schools’ intersect with HIC’s practices of advocacy and the realisation of habitat rights?

**Adriana:** Indeed, the ongoing ethnographic exploration of HIC’s pedagogies is revealing a wide repertoire of tactics that coalesce through the defence and production of housing rights. Beyond Latin America, examples of how these pedagogies unfold through the work of HIC members include, among others, the ‘popular tribunals’ against evictions held across Cameroon by *Association pour l’Amour du Livre et le Développement Local* (ASSOAL). This mechanism is part of the African People Court against evictions and of the International Tribunal on Evictions established in Dakar 2011 at the World Social Forum and the World Assembly of Inhabitants. Working at different scales, *popular* or people’s tribunals bring justice as a matter to be dealt with by ordinary citizens, giving voice to those who are victims or at risk of evictions. The tribunals are not limited to judging, but a mechanism towards the positive solution of cases through periodic monitoring and the mobilisation of local and global solidarity. At the same time, ASSOAL works through local governance schools that support inclusive and climate-sensitive participatory budgeting as well as land security and alternative solutions for social housing. These strategies travel across the defence and production of housing rights as a continuum. One can find multiple similar pedagogic practices across HIC members.

In this sense, HIC acts as a permeable space to listen and learn from each other, in other words, the Coalition is a ‘home’ for the encounter and cross-fertilisation of living pedagogies where their plurality is celebrated and nurtured as a ‘pluriversity’ (see, for example, de Sousa Santos, 2018). The Covid-19 crisis has brought to the fore a collective



realisation of the multiple ways in which proximity and engagement can be promoted and enhanced under remote conditions but also of the digital divide that constraints such opportunities.

**Camila:** We have discussed HIC's practices in relation to translocality, co-production, epistemic justice and learning. All these approaches have in common the principle of diversifying voices and knowledges. I would like to go back to the question of housing struggles and housing rights. We know that housing means many things for different people and institutions: housing can be seen as a means for financial speculation or as a human right; as a home, a site of social reproduction or a site of oppression; as a livelihood and economic asset, as source for tax revenue or a source of debt; as a location in the city, an archive of a collective history and struggles, and as a political space.

You have already described the horizontal practices of HIC and how they deal with a diverse membership in terms of geographical distribution, kinds of organisations and claims. What do you think is the role of a diverse coalition like HIC in building linkages between all those understandings and meanings of housing and home? Are there particular strategies to challenge status-quo conceptualisations of housing struggles?

**Adriana:** HIC has historically championed a strong call for the recognition of the Right to Housing, expanded over time to the defence of the social production of habitat and the Right to the City. As time goes by, we witness new and often competing agendas and framings on what change is required and why. While the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Habitat III New Urban Agenda – or what should rather be the 'New Habitat Agenda' – aim at providing a holistic orientation for change, many adjectives come to qualify the attributes of such change, yet reference to justice is still rare across international agendas.

In parallel, we are witnessing the emerging recognition of challenges such as climate change and the massive social mobilisation of young generations to fight for climate justice. Simultaneously, climate change is rapidly becoming a technology and a narrative to legitimise massive evictions and displacements on the ground. These processes call for constantly re-assessing the shifting map of international priorities and imperatives as well as emerging sites of social mobilisation, in order to maintain a critical perspective on international framings, and to seek alliances with other networks fighting for housing rights. We see housing rights as pivotal in the articulation of all human rights.

In this sense, HIC has always acted as a meaning-making coalition, reframing debates, denouncing, fostering the use of a common terminology that can ignite action at multiple scales. There are so many examples for seeing these practices at play. Take, for instance, the notion of the 'social production of habitat'. It articulates in a few words so many meanings, practices and struggles. It denotes both the political qualities of a process and outcome arising from the experience of communities collectively determining the conditions of their dwelling place and living environment. It takes Lefebvre's work and his core arguments on how capitalism produces and shapes lives and cities beyond

academic debates; it provides a framing to understand the multiple ways in which the social function of habitat and its collective production is eroded and reclaimed over time.

**Camila:** So, is the notion of ‘radical housing’ in any way useful for the work of HIC and, if so, what does it mean to you?

**Adriana:** This notion is central to what HIC does, but the term might resonate more with some members than others. This marks again the importance of attaching value to meanings more than just words.

Housing and land are a key source of (in)equity and (in)justice, and although this affirmation should be self-evident and widely endorsed, sadly it is a ‘radical’ one. Radical housing – in the broad sense – is a useful notion to designate the common fight of coalitions like HIC and others when confronting mainstream politics. It articulates a movement for housing justice from below and across different forms of tenure, which is rooted in people’s everyday needs.

Radical housing puts forward a powerful reframing of the housing crisis that rocked much of the global north post 2008; it reminds us of the contested politics that marks the difference between justice and injustice. It denounces the precarisation of citizenship and of people’s rights, but at the same time, it extends the notion of the housing crisis to a field of political collective agency. Think, for instance, about the conditions of state provision of asylum seeker housing in England and of a decade of legislative hostility that has helped materialise a border regime leading to a hyper-precariation of asylum seekers, both in terms of dwelling and their insertion into the labour market. Reframing this process as a radical housing fight has undressed the insidious politics of unwelcoming cities, and it has also crafted new spaces for social mobilisation and practices of welcoming.

**Camila:** It is clear that HIC facilitates translocal conversations that open up the emergence of knowledges and praxes strategically oriented towards housing rights. The context, into which these conversations are embedded, is relevant, and it is constantly changing. Covid-19, for example, has certainly deepened some of the contextual complexities. In a recent event,<sup>6</sup> you mentioned the importance to keep using the terminology of housing ‘rights’, going beyond the call for justice and struggles, because of the key role that rights have in challenging what you call the ‘precarisation of citizenship’. From this perspective, the focus on rights can be embraced as a praxis that is at once strategic and ethical. When focusing on rights, what are in your view the key challenges ahead for HIC – and similar translocal networks – working in the defence and production of housing and habitat rights? And what are the current actions of HIC to address those challenges?

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<sup>6</sup> Webinar ‘Housing Rights: Looking Back, Looking Forward’, on 9 October 2020, co-hosted by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). More information at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/events/2020/oct/housing-rights-looking-back-looking-forward>

**Adriana:** I believe referring to housing and habitat rights is essential, not because this takes us beyond social mobilisation for justice, but precisely because fighting for the realisation of housing rights brings justice to the fore.

The right to adequate housing was recognised as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 72 years ago! Housing rights have been reinforced over the years by several international conventions, and the increased recognition of what John Turner defined decades ago as Housing by the People. Further propelled by the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987, and the subsequent Global Strategy for Shelter in 2000, housing rights became over time prominent on the human rights agenda of the United Nations. Further significant layers of progress towards the actual realisation of housing rights on the ground were driven simultaneously by networks such as HIC, SDI and ACHR, among others.

But, still today, we witness large masses of the urban poor pushed into a state of ‘bare’ or ‘unhoused citizenship’. Housing rights are now more than ever at the fore of the struggles we face, increasingly endangered through old and new machines of massive eviction, displacement and dispossession. Yet, we also witness the consolidation and emergence of multiple ways of activating housing rights as actual entitlements. In recent months, we have seen this happening through massive bold changes. In the context of Covid-19, this has involved, in many contexts, sweeping measures to tackle homelessness, redeploy existing housing, set up rental and mortgage holidays, suspend evictions, and so on. Furthermore, this moment in history is not only marked by the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the fundamental role that housing plays in the protection of life. It is also marked by the strong re-emergence of race and gender as two crucial dimensions in the realisation of housing rights.

Today, we are also forced to rethink housing rights in light of two massive global challenges, which are deeply interconnected. On the one hand, the increased financialisation of housing, a machine that sees trillions of dollars invested in residential property across the globe, which is deepening housing needs and driving up wealth inequality. What is even more shocking, is that this process continues to be subsidised through tax breaks and bank bailouts, while we see public spending on social housing simultaneously slashed. Unregulated global capital has in recent years not only distorted housing markets all over the world to a level that excludes and expels poor and middle-income families from so-called prime locations; it has also created housing precariousness on an unprecedented scale.

On the other hand, the intersection between climate change and housing rights presents two formidable challenges: first, tackling the heavy contribution of the construction sector to global emissions, which adds another layer of challenges to how housing deficits and the maintenance of existing social housing are approached. This urges us to explore ways not just of building, but of retrofitting, repairing, rehabilitating and redeploying existing housing stocks. Second, by confronting the massive wave of forced evictions and displacement that are being executed worldwide in the name of risk, paradoxically justified

as a means to protect life, which in reality clear the land in economically profitable spots to make place for speculative real estate developments.

Not just today, but over the recession years to come, we face new ways in which housing rights will continue to be isolated as a housing policy question, or dismissed in favour of more 'urgent crises'. A critical question in this sense is how to sustain, deepen and expand these and further measures beyond the pandemic. Housing rights cannot just be protected under emergency conditions; they are central to the right to life. 2020 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN system and two decades since the first UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing was appointed as an independent expert with the mandate to monitor the right to housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living. This year offers a moment of critical reflection about the international infrastructure we rely on for the defence of housing rights and the mushrooming efforts securing the realisation of those rights on the ground. This is a key moment to reflect collectively on what works and what needs to change and to coalesce as a wider justice movement.

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