



ECOSOC • Integration Segment (27–29 May, 2014)
SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

**BUILDING
THE FUTURE**
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**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Contribution to the
2014 United Nations Economic and
Social Council (ECOSOC)
Integration Segment**

ECOSOC Vice-President Letter - 2014 ECOSOC Integration Segment Input from OHCHR

Human rights are universal. People living in urban and rural area have equal rights.

The process of urbanization can play a positive role in the enjoyment of human rights. It can also create more slums, put more people living in inadequate housing and living conditions, homelessness, insecure tenure, and increase disparities, inequalities and discrimination.

People with little or no access to employment, livelihoods and basic services come to cities hoping for better opportunities. Others settle in cities after being forced out of their lands by development projects, land grabbing or conflict. By considering rural development distinctly from urban development and by considering urbanization as a stand-alone process rather than as part of the larger social, political and economic context, opportunities to address development and fulfilment of rights in a holistic way are often missed.

Actors of urbanization should approach their work on the three pillars of the United Nations Charter - peace and security, development and human rights – in an integrated manner.

In the urban context, overly-focusing on growth, markets, and private investment, excessive privatization, and approaching housing, water or land as mere commodities lead every day more people to live in unaffordable and inadequate housing conditions and exacerbated discrimination, exclusion, forced evictions, displacement and growing inequalities. In this context the fight against gentrification processes, corruption, speculation over housing and land is of particular importance.

When we are talking about housing, we are not just talking about four walls and a roof. The right to adequate housing is about security of tenure, affordability, access to services and cultural adequacy. It is about protection from forced eviction and displacement, fighting homelessness, poverty and exclusion. It is a right for all regardless of social status and origin or the type of housing and land tenure and ownership. To promote the right to adequate housing and other human rights, urbanization processes and policies cannot be solely based on economic and financial data that disregard the human reality behind those numbers.

Through integrated social, economic and environmental policies,:

A) Sustainable urbanization must ensure the free, active and meaningful participation of the beneficiaries of development, and in particular of the most marginalized

Urban and spatial development should be done with and for city dwellers. This means wide consultation and participation of all inhabitants – not only the richest and the most powerful - with a view to improving the living conditions and security of tenure of the most vulnerable as a priority.

B) Sustainable urbanization must be a rights-based model that ensures the accountability of duty-bearers and the entitlements of rights-holders

Decisions and processes in cities need to be transparent, inclusive and allow for dispute and complaint mechanisms. Corruption needs to be combatted and rule of law upheld.

C) Sustainable urbanization must address the root causes that violate the principles of non-discrimination and equality and prioritize the need of the most vulnerable

To be sustainable, urbanization cannot turn a blind eye on the root causes that violate the principles of **non-discrimination and equality**, not only on the basis of gender and geography, but also on the basis of race, and language and religion and age and social and economic status. Too often the poor, people living in informal settlements, minorities, migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, people living with disabilities and older persons, are not considered in urban development, resulting in city development that further marginalizes and discriminates against those most in need.

D) Sustainable urbanization must incorporate strategies for the political and economic empowerment of people, especially the most vulnerable and the most marginalized

Urbanization processes need to embrace strategies for the **political and economic empowerment** of people, especially the most vulnerable and the most marginalized. Freedom of speech and assembly, the right to information, consultation and participation in decision-making processes, the right to vote - to name a few - are all crucial to sustainable and fair urban development.

The link between urbanization and development and norms and standards of international human rights law must be explicit. The human rights system offers concrete guidance on ways of integrating human rights in urbanization processes by all actors, among other the “Guiding Principles on security of tenure for the urban poor” and the “Basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement”. In order to monitor sustainability of urbanization, it is important to develop human rights indicators that will assess the social achievements and impact of this process.