



Municipal workers
Services municipaux
Servicios municipales



WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP STATEMENT

Habitat III, 19 October 2016, Quito, Ecuador

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies and Colleagues,

I have the honour to speak here on behalf of the global trade union movement, bringing the voice of all city workers to Habitat3. Workers are the majority of urban dwellers and it is them who will have to implement the New urban Agenda. Besides, their trade unions are critical allies of local and national authorities in developing innovative, progressive urban policies that ensure that cities are fair and inclusive for all.

The recognition of Decent Work as a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda is fundamental. However, we are seriously concerned that a number of critical issues we have repeatedly drawn your attention to are still left unaddressed in this text.

First, no mention of freedom of association, collective bargaining and social dialogue is made in this text. By ensuring constructive dialogue and negotiations leading to binding agreements between worker representatives, business and government on working conditions and broader macro-economic policy issues that directly affect local communities and local economic development, collective bargaining is one of the most powerful mechanisms to fight poverty and inequality, bridge the gender pay gap and contribute to the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as precarious and informal economy workers.

While we recognize the relevance of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms that include trade unions, these spaces cannot replace bi- and tri-partite collective bargaining mechanisms. UN Habitat need to fully include trade unions in the governance system for the implementation and follow up of the New Urban Agenda along with business and governments, who are their social partners and natural counterparts. The New Urban Agenda will not deliver fair cities and equitable outcomes unless workers and their trade unions are be equally involved and represented at par levels with business.

Second, when it comes to municipal finance and fiscal systems, we cannot accept a corporate-like vision of cities that compete with each other on the stock market and on a fiscal race to the bottom to raise private finance to fund essential services that should be instead paid through taxes, including a fair share of corporate tax. Instead of recommending increases in user charge fees and undifferentiated land value capture to protect the municipal services attractiveness for private providers at the expense of middle and low income payers, we need to find more progressive ways to raise endogenous finance while ensuring that systematic tax avoiders pay their fair share of tax directly to the communities where they make profit or to the central governments who then have the responsibility to wire that fair amount via intergovernmental transfers.

Tax justice is a prerequisite for the sustainable funding of quality public services, which are an essential factor of equality and socio-economic inclusion for all city dwellers. Before we ask corporations and the financial market to fund essential infrastructure building and services that should stay in public hands we must ask them to pay their fair share of taxes. The New Urban Agenda needs to face these tough question if it is serious about securing sustainable finance for its implementation.

Third, vested private and corporate interests are pushing for opening up the markets of essential public services as water, sanitation, energy, transportation, education and housing which are all so closely linked to the enjoyment and respect of fundamental human rights and dignity with the intent to reaping profits out of them. Let us not be naive: the private sector is not interested in delivering services for the common good but for shareholder returns. This is not the vision we have for sustainable cities. Essential urban services and infrastructures must stay public, be universally accessible and democratically accountable to urban dwellers and local communities, not privately owned or run for profit. PPPs are an expensive and inefficient way of financing infrastructure and services, since they conceal public borrowing, while providing long-term state guarantees to private companies. Public finance, remunicipalization and public-public partnerships should be considered as a priority route for the realization of an inclusive New Urban Agenda.

Public procurement in the New Urban Agenda must be used as a lever to achieve social, environmental and local economic development objectives, and not focus solely on cost considerations. The inclusion of social and labour clauses and health and safety provisions in public procurement contracts is a life or death issue for building workers working on the construction sites that will stem from the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

We also need an integrated approach to combat corruption, ensure accountability and transparency, dealing with collusion between business and governments that strip public funds: such a framework includes whistle-blower protection.

We will relentlessly continue to advocate and work to build fair, inclusive cities and scrutiny and denounce failure to do so. We demand that cities are for people, not for profit.

Thank you for your attention.