

# Land access on Habitat II agenda

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The United Nations and United Peoples Partnership for Peace conference on disarmament, development and participatory global governance was held in New York on October 6-9, 1995. This assembly of about 100 people, which included representatives of more than 50 United Nations non-governmental organizations (NGOs), issued a two-page concluding statement. Items relevant to securing the human right to the earth include:

(a) building a Peoples' Assembly in the U.N. on the firm foundation of equitably sharing and protecting the earth and the rights of people;

and under the section entitled "people-centered governance for sustainable human development" the following: "We urge relevant U.N. agencies to study alternative methods of taxation, including land value taxation which would shift taxation policies off labour and natural resources, so as to promote a more equitable distribution of wealth around the earth."

Even better news is that Land Access is actually on the official agenda for HABITAT II and includes a section particularly relevant to our goals. HABITAT II will be held in Istanbul in June, 1996.

The relevant portions of the HABITAT II agenda, section b., Ensuring Access to Land, are quoted as follows:

"55. Access to land is a strategic prerequisite to the provision of adequate shelter for all. It is also a precondition for breaking the vicious circle of poverty. Governments at all

levels should strive to overcome all possible obstacles which may hamper equitable access to land...

"Actions. 56. To ensure an adequate supply of serviceable land, governments at the appropriate levels should: ...

"(d) apply transparent, comprehensive, easily accessible and progressive taxation and incentive mechanisms to stimulate efficient, environmentally sound and equitable use of land, exploit the full potential of land-based and other forms of taxation in mobilizing financial resources for service provision by local authorities;

"(e) consider fiscal and other measures, as appropriate, to prevent hoarding of vacant land for speculative purposes and thus increase the supply of land for shelter development;

"(f) develop land information systems and practices for land-value assessment;

"(g) make full use of existing infrastructure in urban areas, encouraging densification of occupation of available services land;

"(h) take advantage of innovative instruments which capture land value gains and recover public investments.

"(i) develop appropriate cadastral systems and streamline land registration procedures in order to facilitate regularization of informal settlements (and simplify land transactions);..."

Prior to HABITAT II, a Regional HABITAT Conference will be held in Amman, Jordan on March 11-14, 1996. It is being sponsored by the Greater Amman Municipality, United Nations Development Program

(UNDP), and the U.N. Center for Human Settlements (HABITAT).

Alanna Hartzok, the alternate representative for the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade (a U.N. NGO), has contacted Ali Shabu, Special Assistant to the Secretary General for HABITAT as to the possibility of the mayors of Harrisburg, Pa., and Novgorod, Russia participating in the Istanbul HABITAT Conference. Mr. Shabu suggested they should first present at the Regional Conference on Arab Cities in Jordan (centering on urban infrastructure), which he said he would like to facilitate. EcoGrad's Tatyana Roskoshnaya is following up with the Novgorod mayor, and also the mayor of a city in Siberia who would like to participate. Hartzok is sending materials to Harrisburg's Business Manager, Napoleon Saunders, since the mayor's schedule is already booked.

A U.S. Network for HABITAT II Issues Forum, "Policy Implications of HABITAT II: How HABITAT II Will Affect U.S. Communities," was just held in Washington, D.C. December 15, 1995. "Many major U.S. cities have United Nations Associations, with which Georgists can link," says Hartzok. "The UNAs are established to educate people about the U.N. and about HABITAT, and can serve as an important link for our movement."

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(GroundSwell acknowledges Hartzok as the information source for this article.)