

# U.N. Habitat II conference attended by Hartzok, Kaczorowski and Vidaver

by Alanna Hartzok, Chambersburg, PA

The United Nations sponsored Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the last great global conference of this decade and hence the millenium, convened in Istanbul June 1-14.

Approximately 15,000 individuals were present. While they represented particular nation states, international social service and civic organizations, businesses, and local public authorities, the common denominator of most was a planetary state of

consciousness which at some nearly ineffable level reflects the perception that all human beings are connected as one family, and that our fate is interconnected. Attending as U.N. NGO (non-governmental organization) representative for the International Union for Land Value Taxation (IULVT), I can attest to the impressive accomplishments yet confounding paradoxes of this event.

The official purpose of Habitat II was to complete work previously begun on an Action Agenda which detailed ap-

*Please see page 5*

# U.N. Habitat II Conference

*Continued from page 1*

proaches to achieving adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in all countries. Three preparatory conferences had preceded the Istanbul gathering in all countries and resulted in much agreement on this 65-page document. Details of the text yet to be resolved were bracketed in the working documents. Final acceptance of the precise wording for such documents is arrived at by consensus, quite an impressive accomplishment for representatives of 183 nation states.

Main elements of contention revolved around the terms "sustainable development" and "sustained economic growth." The former had been a key point of agreement at the so-called "Earth Summit" (U.N. Conference on Environment and Development) in 1993 in Rio, but some developing countries were wary that concerns for sustainability could impede their economic growth and hence favored the term "sustained economic growth."

The other major controversy concerned whether or not it would be stated that housing was a human right. With the delegations from nearly every other nation pushing this right, the United States delegation balked, fearing that the declaration of housing as a human right would open the government to lawsuits from homeless citizens.

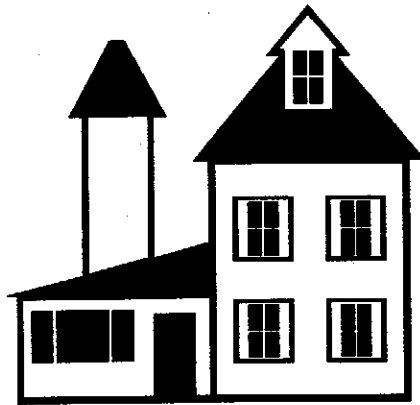
I will note for the record that the role of the Vatican at such a conference often appears as an impediment to smooth progress. Language on the "family" and reproductive rights had been settled at previous U.N. conferences, such as the Cairo Conference on Population but the Vatican men kept pushing their pet perspectives, irregardless of the fact that none of them has ever had a family. My roommate in Istanbul was a rather radical nun, and I will spare readers the expletives she used to describe these men.

## Partnerships

Unique to Habitat II was the inclusion of NGOs, city mayors, and other

local public officials and business leaders as partners in the conference proceedings. This was due in large part to the efforts of Wally N'Dow, Secretary General of the U.N. Center for Human Settlements, the sponsoring organization.

This unprecedented spirit of inclu-



siveness enabled NGOs to make direct contribution to the official document for the first time. Pat Aller, working in New York for the IULVT, had submitted the words "land value taxation" in Section 56, item (d). While the USA and the European Union would have land value taxation remain in the document, another smaller country objected so it was deleted. Nevertheless, this section under the subtitle "Ensuring Access to Land" remains an excellent basis from which to work internationally for the implementation of our policy approach, as "land based taxes", "land value recapture", and the need for accurate land assessments is clearly stated in the final official document. (*Editor's note: items (d), (e), (f), (g), (h) and (i) of Section 56 were printed in the Jan.-Feb. 1996 issue of GroundSwell.*)

While U.N. officials convened in plush surroundings high on a hill in Istanbul's Conference Valley, several thousand NGOs met in the noisy, echoing halls and chambers of the mammoth Takisla University building. Each day

nearly 100 seminars and workshops were presented at the NGO Forum, while approximately 500 booths were set up by organizations from all the world promoting an astounding array of good ideas to improve the human habitat and assure peace and justice on earth.

As IULVT NGO representative, I led five introductory seminars on land value tax policy under the heading of "The Earth Is the Birthright of All People." My usual approach in such venues is to state that the maldistribution of wealth is the major distortion of market economies, and that there is a way to have market systems which are free and efficient, yet also fairly distribute wealth. This statement immediately gets the attention of the audience. I next describe the fundamental flaw in current market arrangements as that of speculating and profiteering in the earth's land and natural resources.

I next point out the important distinction between what nature gives and what humans make. The next step, of course, is to link this ethical perspective to the practicalities of public finance policies and to give working examples of the implementation of land based taxation approaches.

These seminars were attended by people from all over the world, but the greatest interest was from participants from Nigeria, Ghana, India, and Albania; and ongoing working relationships are being established with those individuals.

The participation of Georgists from the Danish Henry George Society was an enormous support to our presence in Istanbul. Svend Dinsen's energy and enthusiasm was a constant boost. He had brought with him for our booth diagrams from the work of Anthony Trowbridge showing a land rent approach to eco-village design and management and presented this in a workshop as well. Jorn Jensen is an expert in Danish land

*Please see page 6*

# U.N. Habitat II Conference

*continued from page 5*

valuation and land cadastres and added his expertise to several seminars. Fred Christiansen preferred attending to the booth to participating in seminars, and his contribution in this important task was greatly appreciated by us all. Each of them have stories of significant relationships that they forged during Habitat II which will carry our work forward throughout the globe.

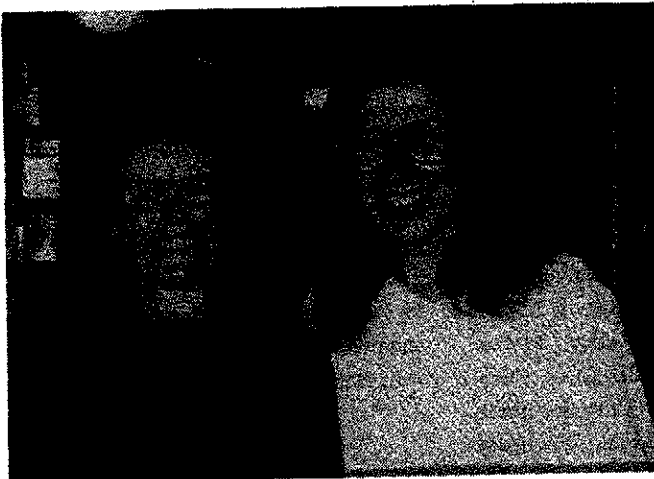
Our sixth and final seminar, also entitled "The Earth Is the Birthright of All People" was our major offering at the NGO forum, with about 70 people attending. Several excellent speakers addressed the theme, including Earth Day Founder John McConnell; Diane Sherwood, director of the Campaign to Fund the United Nations; David Korten, author of an important new book entitled When Corporations Rule the World; and Rashmi Mayur of Bombay who served as Special Advisor to the secretary General for Habitat II.

## **Common Ground-USA Participation**

Mary Rose Kaczorowski and Judith Vidaver, representing Common Ground-USA, also spoke eloquently at this event. Kaczorowski had previously given an NGO workshop on the theme of "For Whom Are We Saving the Earth?" where she premiered her in-process slide show of the same title.

Kaczorowski and Vidaver were very active in their attention to the official U.N. proceedings and in the International Women's Caucus, International Rural/Urban Caucus, and Habitat International Coalition, and lobbied strongly for components of Section 56.

Kaczorowski was pleased to learn that there was a land value tax type of development project being implemented in Kenya, Africa. At the MATHRE 4A Project affordable rent is collected from the land for maintenance, administration and infrastructure. A certain percentage is put into their building fund to replace existing mud structures. The original land site was government surplus property given to the village. A rent department was established to collect and allocate rent. The village has 25,000 people, nearly 75% day laborers. This was a movement led by the women there, although some funding was



Judith Vidaver and Mary Rose Kaczorowski

provided by Germany.

Kaczorowski also distributed 500 copies of the Common Ground-USA position paper to many members of the USA delegation as well as to delegates from Brazil, Cameroon, Kenya, etc., plus numerous copies to the so-called "Super Coalition" of women's organizations, to the Habitat International Coalition, and even one directly to Wally N'Dow. Additionally, 800 Common Ground-USA brochures were also distributed. We estimate that in total nearly 5,000 pieces of Georgist literature were disseminated during Habitat II.

Kaczorowski and Vidaver also presented a Proclamation in support of Habitat II Conference and Agenda for Action on behalf of the Mendocino, California County Commissioners to U.S. HUD Director Cisneros at a photo-op session. The U.S. HUD Director was the head of the U.S.A. delegation to Habitat II.

Svend Dinson and I both gave brief television interviews, though we did not see them, but someone did catch a glimpse of Mary Rose Kaczorowski on the tube standing with a group of people.

I also twice spoke with Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke who was an inspired and enthusiastic participant in the local authorities events. Hopefully his enthusiasm for the U.N. conference will carry over into implementation of land value recapture policies for his city.

## **Alternative Habitat Activities**

Contrapuntal to the officially scheduled Habitat events were several alternative Habitat activities organized by Turkish human rights groups and Green politicians to publicly protest the destruction of almost 3,000 Kurdish villages and the consequent creation of almost 3 million refugees. These groups contended that such a situation is incompatible with the goals of Habitat and reflect serious threats to democratic governance in Turkey. (*Editor's note: See related article contributed by Hartzok from the 6-9-96 Internet.*)

Several times the government of Turkey responded to these activities with severe repression and curtailment of freedom of speech. At one point the police closed down a building used by NGOs boycotting the conference and protesting government policy towards the Kurds.

I had been invited to speak on "Who Owns the Earth?" at one of the alternative Habitat events, but the afternoon session was canceled because there were demonstrations on that street and over 600 people were arrested. My Turkish friend, Orzhuc Orhan, a young student who had invited me to speak (organized over the Internet) left in order to write press releases and to do other work in support of those arrested but was soon arrested himself and spent two days in jail sitting on a bench with 50 others in the cell.

*Please see page 7*

# U.N. Habitat II Conference

continued from page 6

Fred Christiansen and his wife Winnie were in the thick of it that day, and saw five people getting bashed and blood flowing. Luckily they were not jailed as well. Myself and David Stanfield, who is working in Albania under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Center, were thankful to take refuge offered by a shop owner on that street that day. Massive numbers of police were a continued presence at this conference, where they provided alternatively security and repressive services.

Alternative Habitat events sponsored (and therefore "sheltered") by the European Parliament Greens did continue uninterrupted. I spent part of two days at this venue and learned firsthand of the atrocities being perpetrated against the Kurds, who pleaded that those of us from Europe and the USA urge our governments to stop marketing and sending military equipment into the region. Such war zones reflect the land problem in its most horrendous and violent form.

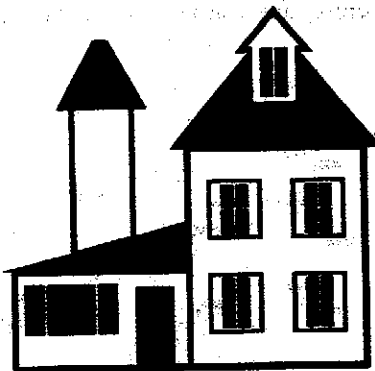
But on a hopeful note, one of my greatest Turkish delights was when I first met Orhan and he was wearing an Alternative Habitat button bearing the question "Who Owns the Earth?" I told him I liked his button, and he laughed and gave me one, saying "You are the mother of the button." Our EMail and Internet correspondence had resulted in the inclusion of the land problem and consideration of our proposals for ground rent collection in the Alternative Habitat activities. They were selling these buttons as a way to raise a little money. I will treasure mine forever.

## Implementation and Follow-Up

Section F of the Habitat Action Agenda details directives for implementation and follow-up of the Habitat Agenda. The Commission on Human Settlements, under the U.N. Economic and Social Council, will promote integrated and cohesive policies at all levels, aiming at achieving the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human

settlements development.

National mechanisms are to be established or improved to coordinate ac-



tions at all relevant government levels that have an impact on human settlements. Local authorities are to be supported in their efforts towards implementing the Habitat Agenda inasmuch as local action is required.

Section 71, paragraph (i) gives the U.N. Center for Human Settlements the task of maintaining and updating a "global directory of consultants and advisers to supplement the skills available within the U.N. system and, where necessary, to assist in the recruitment of experts at the global level, including those belonging to developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Foreseeing the need for consultants to assist in the implementation of the Habitat II Action Agenda's call for land based taxes and "innovative instruments that capture gains in land value and recover public investments," prior to Istanbul I had taken initial steps in developing a consulting organization for this purpose.

I am calling this new consulting organization Earth Rights Institute. Institute associates will include those with the greatest expertise within our movement and will be able to guide communities and governing bodies through all stages of the implementation of this policy approach.

Earth Rights Institute will be able to assist with all phases, beginning with the

initial education and advocacy process, through the political groundwork that may be required to obtain enabling legislation, into land assessments, establishing accurate land cadastres, and the structuring and implementation of specific fiscal instruments that will secure the collection of ground rents for the benefit of all.

Earth Rights Institute will thereby coordinate and integrate our movement's presence within the U.N. system and its various relevant agencies. There can be a role for all Georgists in this effort, as Earth Rights Institute will also link and network Georgists throughout the world with NGOs and U.N. agency officials who are involved in the Habitat II process. The implementation of land value recapture policy approaches will thereby be optimized worldwide.

An Earth Rights website has been established which will disseminate information on the implementation of local, regional and global public finance policies based on the democratic human right to the earth via collection of the ground rent of common heritage resources. It will include pointers to the several excellent websites that have been established by others in our movement as well as a directory of organizational members of the Council of Georgist Organizations.

The URL for Earth Rights website is <http://www.envirolink.org/orgs/earthrights>. Georgists who would like to be formally associated with Earth Rights Institute may contact me by phone or fax at 717/263-2820; EMail [earthrts@pa.net](mailto:earthrts@pa.net); or snail mail, P.O. Box 328, Scotland, PA 17254, USA.

*Editor's note: Alanna Hartzok is the U.N. NGO representative of the International Union for Land Value Taxation, secretary of the Council of Georgist Organizations, a coordinator for the Pennsylvania Fair Tax Coalition, and a member of Common Ground-USA.*