

Thematic session 2AM 01 Associations of Inhabitants
Wednesday 5 December at 9:00 am in the Grand Amphitheatre
Summarised Report by the Session Chair (No rapporteur present)

The Session was introduced and chaired by **Mike Davies**, Interim Convenor, International Alliance of Inhabitants who spoke about the importance of associational democracy as an alternative to both representative democracy and direct democracy. He said that the really 'Big Men' of Africa in the next decade will be those who embrace change and promote the participation of all our citizens. Africa's rapid urbanisation is a reality we should embrace but we need different systems of governance that establish people as the central aspect of urban government, that overcome the problems of representative democracy and the negative aspects of city life. Successful cities are managed by efficient and competent technocrats answerable to elected and accountable politicians who formulate policies that aspire to meet the expectations of citizens. Inclusive cities cannot be managed for the benefit of the few, for those who seek profit at the expense of others. Associations of Inhabitants can be an effective mechanism for citizen participation within neighbourhoods, providing an effective monitoring and reporting system for urban managers too as citizens are often the best observers of their own communities.

Zwelakhe Makgalemele, Litigation Fellow with the Socio Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) discussed the development and importance of the law in establishing access to housing in the South African context especially for the poor. He said that advocacy and interpretation are still necessary to give meaning to the Constitution provisions. SERI has helped to establish minimum standards regarding adequate housing and evictions and works to assist social movements and poor communities to defend and uphold their rights.

Bandile Mdlalose, Secretary General of Abahlali baseMjondolo South Africa, spoke of the use of direct action as a tool to highlight the plight of the urban poor. Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement SA was formed in 2005 as a non-partisan, non-political organization by people tired of the false promises from politicians to respond to the challenges of illegal eviction, forceful removals, lack of basic services, unemployment and more in the struggle for human dignity. South Africa has a rich constitution which is not implemented: section 26 of the constitution states "no one may be evicted in their homes and be left homeless without giving them alternative shelter" but this often violated. AbM's role as the Movement is to bring the government to the people and the people to the government. They don't do anything 'for' the people but 'with' them because there is nothing for the people without the people. Their victories include opposition to the Slums Act of 2008 which was overturned by the Constitutional Court.

The Movement faces violent repression by local authorities and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) but has established itself as a legitimate player through protest and court action. It also acts as a corruption monitor. Politicians and government officials should not take decisions for the people but help the people to take decisions on themselves.

Peter Muzambwe, Director of the Amandla Centre of Zimbabwe spoke about housing cooperatives in Zimbabwe which are playing an increasing role in meeting housing needs which were worsened by the notorious Operation Murambatsvina of 2005. Establishing cooperatives is controlled by both central and local authorities who engage in corruption. There should be an independent board to run the allocations system.

Hellen Muchunu a Regional Coordinator with the National Taxpayers Association (NTA), Kenya highlighted the background of the NTA and described their programmes that focus on inhabitants participation. The Citizens' Constituency Development Fund Report Cards (CRCs) places citizens in charge of managing government and NTA has produced CRCs for various constituencies and local authorities across the country as well as sector based CRCs. NTA has also successfully held over 100 public forums in different parts of the country that assemble citizens to create awareness about usage of taxpayers' funds and other issues related to governance. NTA has also formed Citizen Monitoring Groups - community volunteers who act as a link between the organization and the larger community. Since their formation, CMCs have successfully engaged with various government departments, local authorities and other stakeholders to monitor the utilization of taxpayers' funds as well as steer development in the constituencies where they are based.

Kone Massa Secretary General of UACDDDD/NO-VOX, Mali spoke of the need to promote citizens with rights, especially through direct action to demand these rights. He decried the exclusionary nature of Africities and called for greater participation by ordinary people.

Mme **Yvette Claudine Ngono**, Mayor of Yaoundé 5, Cameroon spoke of projects that were developed from the top down and that were not of interest to people in communities. Changing to people-centred projects is essential to ensure that projects are relevant, participatory and owned by communities. As a result of the change in attitudes, there is now a substantial allocation of financial resources to local development committees.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion with the audience with a range of questions from both local authorities, corporations and social movements.