

Global Day of Action for Housing Rights

By Rebecca Himlin and Hermine Engel, February 2008, (Published on NGO Pulse)

Planact, a Johannesburg-based urban community development NGO focusing on sustainable human settlements and local governance, supported the global call to ACT TOGETHER for HOUSING for ALL by participating in the Global Day of Action for Housing Rights on 26 January 2008 in Muldersdrift.

An initiative of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) linked to the broader call to action by the World Social Forum, the international campaign served to highlight:

- *the struggles against* evictions and any deprivation of housing and land rights; financial speculation and corruption; and the negative effects of privatisation of land, housing, water and public services
- *and the struggles for* the inclusive city, dignity and affordability of housing; security of tenure, and the sustainability of our environment.

In support of the campaign, Planact together with the community of Muldersdrift hosted an event with the theme "*Global Day of Action for Housing Rights: Space for the poor in the city*" to discuss government plans and community action on housing rights and the inclusive city. Approximately 150 representatives from the communities of Muldersdrift, Vosloorus, Ivory Park, Sol Plaatjies, Thembelihle, Kliptown, and Diepsloot participated in the event.

The event also served to launch the findings of a recent study on land management and democratic governance in Johannesburg, conducted by Planact and Wits University. The study was concerned with the lack of innovation in thinking and practice around land management, creating a situation where South Africa's towns and cities continue to develop without an adequate framework for managing land development in a way that supports the goals of democracy, equity, efficiency and sustainability. It makes a number of recommendations towards more inclusive, pro-poor land management practices.

To provide the international context for this local event, Planact's Executive Director, Rebecca Himlin, highlighted commitments made by the international community. She noted that the issue of getting rid of slum conditions is on the international agenda, and forms part of the Millennium Development Goals. These goals seek to improve living conditions for the poor and vulnerable, and targets were set by the governments of the world at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. However, the crisis is much bigger than some of these targets suggest.

According to the Commission for Africa, at least 72% of all Africans in urban areas live in slums, and worldwide an estimated 1 billion people live in slums. The target that was set for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was to improve the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 - but because of population growth and migration to urban areas, if nothing else is done, this means that by 2020 there will still be 1.3 billion people living in slums instead of 1.4 billion! This is why African leaders have called on the United Nations to set a goal of reducing the overall number of slum dwellers by half. The need to create sustainable human settlements has been one of the issues that the World Social Forum meetings have discussed, and this has resulted in the 'World Charter on the Right to the City,'

which serves as an important statement of principles and rights that should be upheld for residents of urban areas.

Providing a local perspective on the campaign, Molefi Selibo, a community leader in Muldersdrift shared the experience of the Muldersdrift community's struggle for land and housing developments since 1996. Housing development projects in the area initiated more than 10 years ago by the Muldersdrift Home Trust Foundation and Mogale City Local Municipality are still struggling for approval and implementation as a result of an unfavourable land development policy framework affecting semi-rural areas. Selibo called on communities to support the hearing for the proposed Ethembaletu Housing development lodged by the Muldersdrift Home Trust Foundation. The dates set by the Gauteng Land Development Tribunal are as follows: pre-hearing on 14 February and the actual hearing on 3 March at the Muldersdrift Spar Hall..

The councilor for ward 23 in Mogale City, Siphiso Isaac Dube, extended a vote of thanks to all the community representatives and Planact for coming together to address the issue of land and housing rights and urged those present to develop and implement a plan of action to ensure that everyone has access to sustainable human settlements.

Community leaders and Planact endorsed the following statement of principles:

This **statement of principles** strives to encourage all community members, civic movements, organisations, and government to act together to create a space for all in the city.

Our towns and cities should provide safe, clean, healthy and sustainable human settlements for all irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity and social status.

WE SHOULD RAISE AWARENESS FOR COMMUNITIES TO ACCESS THEIR SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RIGHTS:

We should work toward integrated development to overcome the legacy of apartheid and its segregated settlements with second-class services.

Our communities should work in solidarity against forced eviction and landlessness.

Our government should locate land for affordable housing alternatives in close proximity to social and economic opportunities.

Our government should provide and maintain infrastructure, sewerage systems, water and electricity for all.

WE SHOULD ALL STRIVE TO STRENGTHEN AND PROMOTE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT:

Our communities should have access to improved, effective communication channels to raise priorities with government.

Our communities should receive all the necessary information on land and housing policies and opportunities from the government.

Our communities should fully participate in the land and housing planning and decision-making processes.

We should all
ACT TOGETHER FOR HOUSING FOR ALL!
