



# Bulletin on Housing Rights and the Right to the City in Latin America 2008 | #04

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# The connections between the right to housing, urban planning, environmental issues and racial and ethnic inequality: the challenges of the Brazilian experience

By Sebastian Tedeschi

This edition of the Bulletin concentrates on the Brazilian experience. The largest country in Latin America assumed significant leadership when the Right to the City was included in the Constitution exactly twenty years ago. This inclusion allowed the country to advance in various aspects which, some sooner and some later, would also become important to the neighboring countries in the region.

Execution of policies making the Right to Housing effective met with considerable resistance when being implemented by the public authorities. Local Governments, Real Estate developers, the marginalized urban population, social movements, planners, ethnic communities and environmentalists all made their voices heard in the fierce debates on how to organize and regulate the urban sectors.

The principal theoretical reference point for the understanding of this conflict is provided in Edésio Fernandes' article where he proposes the articulation of the public policies with urban planning as a means of facing up to spatial segregation in the cities. The text explains how the State itself, in the first instance, determines the formation of real estate

prices by its decisions on the use of urban land and ends up with the exclusionary logic of the marketplace. Because of this, the author emphasizes the crucial part to be played by the municipalities in the distribution of expenses and benefits to overcome the social/spatial apartheid.

This new slant on the urban question was utilized by Brazil in its new (1988) Constitution. In this respect, Nelson Saule explains to us how Brazil was the first country to dedicate an entire Chapter in the Constitutional text to the urban order and to the Right to the City. However, this victory was only a first step, for the urban social movements which had to struggle on for another 12 years to get the Constitutional Mandate into practical use by the approval of the Statute of the Cities in 2001. Along these lines, the author helps us to understand how this became a judicial reference for the urban social battles and for the creation of policies and legislation during these two decades.

However, at the present time these gains still need to be defended - above all from the tension between the environment and urban planning arising from the legislative debate on the Law of Urban Land Division (Lei de

Parcelamento do Solo Urbano - nº 6.766/79) also known as the Law of Territorial Responsibility. Observing the pressure from the Real Estate sector and the Official Registry Offices in the debate on this Law, Letícia Osório proposes that we agree to a revised territorial order starting from a new urbanistic-environmental regulatory reference point that recognizes those that today live in urban spaces, and strengthens the effectiveness of the public municipal authorities in controlling the use, occupation and urban management of land to ensure that the public interest trumps private profit.

Finally, Gilsely Barreto demonstrates how excessively rationalized and linear planning does not take into consideration the cultural and territorial reference that are important to the population. For this reason, our attention is directed to the ethnic-racial element in public policy and in the theoretical debate on urban spaces. This diversity is illustrated by consideration of urban *Quilombos*<sup>1</sup> cases in Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre that should lead us to reconsider the urban-rural dichotomy and approach the city as an ethnically-conceived space.

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<sup>1</sup> *Quilombo* (singular) is the Brazilian-African name given to communities of predominately Afro-Brazilians formed by escaped slaves and other fighters for liberty during the historical black resistance movements.

# On the importance of urban planning in defense of this right

Edésio Fernandes \*

**The governments of this region have not formulated housing policies that are coherent with other public policies or aligned with urban planning. This has resulted in the social and spatial segregation of populations in Latin American cities.**

One of the principal characteristics of the housing policies historically undertaken by Latin American public authorities is that, in addition to being insufficient to meet housing demands, they are sectorial and isolated. They are also not conceptualised in coordination with other public policies regarding infrastructure, transport and the environment.

Perhaps most importantly, housing policies have not been developed in coordination with informal settlement regularisation policies and urban planning. This has contributed to a process of segregation based on social or income considerations, which has displaced low-income populations to unsuitable areas and created a rich and poor divide in the cities of the region. This has created a vicious and perverse circle, even if still incipient. The Latin American tradition holds to the idea that urban planning is merely a means of territorial regulation and does not take into account that urban and environmental regulations can have a serious impact on the prices of land and

properties, as well as influencing the real estate market.

Thus, without considering in any depth the socio-economic realities of access to land and housing, without interfering significantly in the concentrated structure of private property, and without questioning the unequal distribution of public equipments and services, the ongoing urban planning has contributed to increasing prices in real estate markets, as well as stimulating speculation. This can easily be verified by checking the unused land, the half-occupied buildings and the deteriorated central areas of many of our cities.

In such a context, in which access to land with public services and infrastructure is strongly limited, there are no processes to stimulate the production of social housing by the private sector. The results are easily identifiable in the urban structure: while a growing percentage of the population can only obtain access to urban land and housing by invading public areas, environmental protection reserves or land on the outskirts of the cities, the implementation of public sectors of social housing can only be pursued in peripheral areas where the land is cheaper.

Ironically, it is the same Public Power that determined the formation of prices – through

urban planning policies – becomes a prisoner of the exclusionary logic of the housing market; the same applies to housing cooperatives and other forms of community organisation. Even policies for mass housing construction projects (such as those of Chile, South Africa or France, among many others) have been questioned because they reinforce problems of spatial segregation by locating the social housing in peripheral areas without public infrastructure or services, thereby requiring the residents to undertake considerable costs and long journeys to get to work, and further increasing social exclusion.

Reversing this historical disaster, requires much more than the construction of small houses and the offer of serviced plots in significant numbers and at accessible prices. It requires, above all, proper coordination between the housing policies and urban planning so as to democratise access to land and the housing. Certainly, tenure regularisation of the consolidated informal settlements is a very important step towards the practical realisation of the right to housing. However, given the very high social, environmental, economic and judicial costs of regularising the informal settlements, regularisation alone cannot be the principle policy for land access and housing in the cities. It must be integrated with preventative policies that guarantee the right to housing in a wider

sense. The contribution to be made by territorial regulation in the promotion of social and spatial inclusion and the improvement of the social and environmental quality of urban life is fundamental and includes policies that attribute social functions to public lands, to urban areas kept empty for speculation, to under-utilised buildings, and to deteriorated central areas, in addition to setting aside central urbanised areas for social housing projects (the Brazilian Zeis system is a good example of such a policy).

The municipalities can play a crucial part in this respect by establishing adequate urban and environmental regulations and promoting the many and diverse forms of partnerships between the public and private sectors. Special attention should be given to the establishment of finance conditions for any urban development project, so that the costs and benefits are justly distributed. Furthermore, fiscal and extra-fiscal policies should be developed and enforced by the municipal authority to redirect a fair portion of the real estate profits and capital gains obtained by owners as a result of investments of public money elsewhere in the city to the consolidated informal settlements and the housing projects. Furthermore, there should be the implementation of a fair system for the recovery of at least part of the gains obtained by third parties from the transfer of constructive rights and other forms of valorisation of real estate patrimony resulting directly or indirectly from public investment.

**Addressing the Association of Local Governments in South Africa on 23 April 2007, President Thabo Mbeki made the following declaration:**

“One of the principal challenges we identified in 2004 was the need to transform the standards for apartheid settlements. Except for a very few, our municipalities have not responded in a positive way to this challenge. We still see settlement standards where the houses of the poorer people are being constructed on the outskirts of our cities, often a long way from their workplaces. It is unacceptable that municipalities continue to allocate lands close to commercial centers exclusively to real estate promoters that build only for the higher echelons of the housing market. We must end this practice because, by maintaining it, we are not using housing as a catalyst to integrate communities that have been artificially divided for so many years by apartheid”

There is an important lesson in these words for Latin American municipalities that, in general, have not understood the determining part played by urban and rural ownership policies in the creation of the social and spatial apartheid that has for so many decades characterised the process of urbanisation in the region.

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Nelson Saule Júnior.\*

As part of the process of democratisation of Brazilian society, the 1988 Constitutional text recognized the Right to the City as a “fundamental” right. This initiative was the result of joint action by various entities of civil society and popular movements, and was taken to reverse social inequities by implementing a new social ethic that would introduce an important dimension to the politicalisation of the urban question - understood as a fundamental element in this process of democratisation of the country.

### The political process in the creation of the Right to the City in Brazil

The proposal for a popular amendment to the 1988 constitutional text was intended to include a set of principles, rules and instruments capable of institutionalising the rights of people who live in cities. This would empower the Public Authorities - especially the municipal administrations - to utilise urbanisation and legal instruments specifically designed to oblige or convince urban property owners to respect the social function of their holdings and also to promote public

policies leading to the practical implementation of the Rights (1).

In the political process of democratisation of the Brazilian State, this citizen's amendment introduced the idea that the Right to the City<sup>2</sup> included elements such as the inherent right of people to dignified living conditions, to fully enjoy citizenship, to basic human rights (civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental), to participate in city management and to live in an ecologically balanced and sustainable environment.

This citizens' amendment was included in the Constitution as a Chapter on Urban Policy in which the principles of the social function of the city and of urban property were considered indicators of the desired orientation for future policies of urban development. Furthermore, the Master Plan for the City (*Plano Diretor*) to be produced by the Municipalities became the main instrument for promotion of these policies, thus strengthening the municipal administration within the Federative organisation. Another fundamental innovation was the recognition that the low income population living in informal settlements for more than five years had acquired the

right of legal ownership of their land up to an area of 250 m<sup>2</sup>.

Based on these precepts, the Right to the City is seen as a collective right for democratic and participatory management of the cities; for fulfilling the social function of Property; for guaranteeing social justice and dignified living conditions for all inhabitants; and for establishing penalties for those property owners who do not respect the social function of their holdings.

From this process of the elaboration of the Constitution sprang the political and cultural idea of considering the Right to the City as a locomotive powering urban reform, and this soon became a reference point for the urban social struggles of communities, organizations and citizens' movements fighting for the recognition and protection of their lands, their histories and their cultural identities and for the right to participate in the management of their cities. Furthermore, it has become a beacon for local authorities and managers, parliamentarians and political parties who are engaged in preparation of urban legislation or the execution of urban development programs and plans to

combat social and territorial inequalities in Brazilian cities.

However, since the 1990s the Right to the City has only gradually gained acceptance among institutions, mainly due to social pressure by citizens' movements and forums for the defense of these rights as well as urban reforms buttressed by the experience of Municipal Governments that have introduced instruments and organisations for democratic management of the City - such as the preparation of Investment Budgets with the participation of citizens (*orçamento participativo*). Utilisation of the standards of the Right to the City as paradigms for the promotion of urban policies concerned with social and territorial inclusion obliges the cities to give higher priority to social functions in a series of actions and measures designed for greater democratisation; to combat discrimination - especially that directed against residents of informal settlements; to utilise public and private spaces and properties to promote social-environmental and cultural interests; to preserve communities' historical and cultural patrimony; to increase the availability of adequate urban housing, equipment and services for all city inhabitants; to adopt

special measures of protection and integration for those in vulnerable situations and so on.

### **Institutional and Juridical recognition of the Right to the City in the Statute of the City**

Another outstanding result of the valorisation of the Right to the City in the institutional field was the approval of a National Law for urban development known as the Statute of the City (2001). It took twelve years of social struggle to get it approved in the Brazilian Congress and involved difficult discussion with the conservative political parties, powerful financial groups operating in Real Estate and the traditional technocrats who controlled urban planning and management. Unsurprisingly, resistance was strong to a nation-wide law which gave greater political strength to the municipalities and civil society in urban land management and in planning the cities with social control and active participation by citizens.

Approval of the Statute of the City had a profound impact on the Right to the City; it ceased to be a right recognised only in

the political field and became a right accepted in judicial circles, and thus was integrated with the other collective and diffuse rights, such as the right of the consumer, of the environment, of the child and of the adolescent.

To this extent the Brazilian experience broke new ground in establishing judicial recognition of the legal protection provided by the new Statute. The traditional manner of seeking protection in the legal system always involved the concept of protection of an individual right, so that what was protected was the human person in the city environment. The concept of the Right to the City in the new Brazilian legislation is quite different because it has been instituted with objectives and elements of its own and appears as a new human right, or in technical judicial language, as a fundamental right.

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## Judicial definition of the Right to the City

The Statute of the City defines the right to sustainable cities, such as the right to urban land, to housing and to leisure for present and future generations. Mention is also made of democratic management by participation of the population and associations representative of the various segments of the community in the formulation, execution and supervision of plans, programs and projects of urban development.

This judicial definition of the right to the city includes an element similar to the right to the environment which establishes that its constituent components – such as housing – must be guaranteed. This definition illustrates that the right is a collective or diffuse right of all city inhabitants. For example, a traditional city community in danger of losing its historical memory may demand the protection of this community's right by citing the Right to the City as defined in the Statute.

As a result of this judicial definition, persons who acquire legal protection from its terms are groups of inhabitants and communities that have formed an identity and have historical and cultural memories of the city and the social groups and communities that live in consolidated but informal settlements, who can make demands on public authorities or institutions, as well as actions and plans for urbanisation projects and ownership regularisation of social interests.

With regard to the references to democratic management, exercising the right to the city

signifies the use of political and citizenship rights in a collective manner. Thus, the right to the city will be fully respected only when marginalised and excluded social groups gain access to the political and economic life of the city. The exercise of this right implies that these social groups must be suitably instructed in its use.

On the other hand, democratic management of the city as one of the rights to the city involves recognition of the legitimacy of action in the administrative and judicial spheres by vulnerable groups – those who live in poor suburbs, allotments, habitational conjuntos and informal/irregular settlements.

Furthermore, this right also covers the development of democratic processes of urban planning based on fundamental elements such as the multi-year plan, the law of budgetary directives, the municipal budget, and the Municipal Master Plan (plano diretor) in those municipalities where it is obligatory.

In this manner, the Community and the State act together in the management and control of Public Activity. The democratic management of the city presupposes the organisation of civil society so as to make it capable of intervening in the political process to advance the social demands by the exercise of citizenship. Therefore, the instruments of participatory democracy need to be used as a means of guaranteeing the right to sustainable cities.

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<sup>1</sup> People's amendment to the Constitutional Project attracted signatures from 131,000 electors and was presented by ANSUR (*Articulação Nacional do Solo Urbano*) MDF (*Movimento de Defesa do Favelado*), FNA (*Federação Nacional dos Arquitetos*) FNE (*Federação Nacional dos Engenheiros*), Coordenação nacional dos Mutuários and IAB (*Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil*), Source: Constitutional Records, Federal Senate, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> This citizens' amendment introduced the idea of the Right to the City to the political process of democratization of the Brazilian State by the following propositions:

*Every citizen has the right to dignified urban living conditions and social justice and the State undertakes to ensure:*

*I – the availability of housing, public transport, sanitation, electric power, street lighting, communication, education, health, leisure and security as well as the preservation of the environmental and cultural patrimony.*

*II – Democratic management of the city.*

*The Right to dignified urban living conditions makes the use of the Right to Property conditional on the social interest in the use of urban buildings and subjects it (the right to property) to the principal of the state of need.*

# The Projected Law of Territorial Responsibility: The challenge of placing public interests above private interests in the production of cities

\* Leticia Osório

The revision of the Brazilian Federal Law nº 6766/79 on urban land division – known as the Projected Law of Territorial Responsibility – in the Chamber of Deputies (PL 3057/00) is proceeding amid permanent conflict between social and economic forces representing divergent interests. The challenge is how to strengthen the actions of the municipal public authorities in processes involving the use, occupation and management of urban land by integrating institutional actions and ensuring the prevalence of public interests over private.

## Pressures exercised by the Real Estate and cartorial markets

The conflict mentioned above is partly the result of pressure applied by groups connected to various real estate sectors, lobbying to obtain approval of urban condominiums with ground plan layout areas and other parameters contravening the maximum and minimum areas specified in the urban regulations. Other pressures come from the proprietors of the official Registry Offices (*cartórios de registro de imóveis*) who see additional profits in the possibility of an increase in legal action seeking Ownership Regulation for Low Income Informal Settlements<sup>1</sup> (as provided for in the new Law), and lobby for the elimination of clauses in Federal Legislation (nº 10.932/04 e 11.481/07) that call for this kind of service to be provided by the Registry Offices free of charge. In fact, the amounts involved are large – over 12 million Brazilians live in precarious settlements – and the Registry Owners have support from some sections of the Federal Congress.

## Divergences between the environment and urban planning

The projected Law of Territorial Responsibility opens the way for the unification of environmental and urban licences for land division. However, many organisations for the defence of the environment are

opposed to this unification of urban and environmental norms operating in urban spaces, particularly when the integration of urban and environmental licences for land division is involved. In this respect, in January of this year, the CONAMA (*Conselho Nacional do Meio Ambiente*) approved a motion rejecting the unification of licences because they considered this might result in weakening certain requirements for an environmental licence and permit approval of potentially polluting commercial undertakings. However, it should be noted that the proposed Law in question concerns only the division of the land itself and does not authorise any activities or undertakings that may be proposed for the areas that have been divided or separated. In addition, the integrated licence may only be issued by municipalities with local management having full powers (*gestão plena*) – otherwise an environmental licence issued by the State (as distinct from the Municipality) is required.

This *gestão plena* give the municipality more power to act with greater technical capacity, transparency and participation in urban-environmental management and to enforce the fulfillment of the social functions of the City and of Property in accordance with the Federal Constitution. A municipality is considered to have *plena gestão* when it possesses an approved Master Plan (*plano diretor*), collegiate organisations for social control and specific executive organs.

Perhaps the distorted intentions included in the proposals defended by these sectors is facilitated by the absence in the law of a reference to the constitutional principals that orient urban planning and management, to wit: *social functions of the city*, by democratisation of municipal planning, management and access to urbanised land and public services *general access to assets of common use by the people*; *the social function of Property*, by occupation of empty or unused



urban spaces; *the guarantees of the Right to Housing and of sustainable development of the urban settlements*, by ownership regularisation and urbanisation of precarious settlements; *the guarantee of an ecologically balanced environment; and the recuperation by the public authorities of the urban value-added by government investment.*

Urban expansion pressures on protected environmental areas will only be alleviated by the offer of formal and adequate habitation for the low-income population and urbanisation *in situ* of the consolidated informal settlements. Unification of the legislation and environmental urban management is a condition *sine qua non* if the expanding city is to attain economic and environmental sustainability and provide social justice and universal access, but this can only be obtained when growth is linked to social necessities and not to speculative interests

### **Some contributions for improving the Law of Territorial Responsibility**

The existing model of urban growth, identified by irregular horizontal expansion, low density and lack of infrastructure, indifferently directed by real estate interests, creates a formal habitation market of little reach and inaccessible to the low-income classes. Therefore, the requirement for obligatory reservation of certain percentages of land for habitation of social interest (to be determined by the habitation plans in accordance with the needs of each municipality) is an instrument that must be incorporated in the projected Law in order to increase the quantities of housing offered.

On the other hand, the question of multiple use of Brazilian preservation areas needs to be investigated. Studies<sup>2</sup> mapping and measuring the coverage of the environmental and indigenous legislation demonstrate that more than 60% of the country's land is classified as Federal or State Conservation Units, Indigenous lands (TIs) or legal reserve areas. Considerable portions of these areas are occupied for habitation or for agriculture. In view of this situation, one of two actions must be taken: (i) Adjust the reality to the Law by removing the plantations and the resident populations; or (ii) Line up the law with reality, by rewriting the legal territorial classifications – this would at least have the advantage of raising the quality of discussion. For this it would be necessary to establish a new environmental and

urban reference standard that takes into account the situation on the ground in setting up models for urban occupation. The Law of Territorial Responsibility will only achieve this objective if the public interest is given priority over private greed and if it can resolve the disassociation between public functions bearing on the question of land regulation.

<sup>1</sup> Understood as a process intended for territorial and judicial regularisation of precarious settlements.

<sup>2</sup> In a recent study by EMBRAPA (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*) the researcher Evaristo de Miranda points out the existence of "a conflict between legality and legitimacy in the use and occupation of land which is expected to increase". Based on data provided by IBAMA (*Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis*) and FUNAI (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*) the areas covered by the national environmental and indigenous legislation was mapped and quantified. Considering the Federal and State Conservation Units (CU's) created up to June 2008, the researchers found that the total of CUs and Native Brazilian lands (TI's) in Brazil was 2,294,000.00 km<sup>2</sup>, or 27% of the entire country. Adding to this the 5.000.000 km<sup>2</sup> of statutory (legal) reserve, more than 60% of the country's land is a reserve of one kind or another. This data refers only to Federal and State reserves - adding the municipal UC's, RPPN's (*Reservas Particulares de Patrimônio Natural*), military áreas, state and municipal APA's (Environmental Protection Areas) would increase still further the reserved lands. The study also indicates that many of these areas cover the same land as is used for coffee and apple plantations, and that the APPs instituted recently by the CONAMA Resolution 302/2000, (defined as areas occupied by the rivers and the flood plains plus 500 meters on each side as safety margins) overlay cities, river dwellings ports, low-water agriculture and animal feeding pastures, thus making them all illegal. The APP's associated to hydrographic reserves total 1,845,000 km<sup>2</sup> country wide (22%).



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## Colour and identities in the Cities

\* Gilsely Bárbara Barreto Santana

Cities are home to many social conflicts played out against a background of the ever-increasing urbanisation of modern society. Therefore, the innovative idea of the Right to the City is being developed to counter the logic of exclusive and private appropriation of city spaces, to guarantee the welfare of inhabitants and the social development of the cities.

The Right to the City is manifested in public policies for education, health, transport, adequate housing, ownership regulation, access to essential public services (water, electric power, basic sanitation) etc. To achieve these benefits, the public authority employs systems of planning and organisation of the urban areas by written instruments such as the City Master Plan, Zoning and Land Division systems.

Such elements are obviously important, but nonetheless, cities have become excessively rationalised and planned to the detriment of other elements such as cultural references, spiritual and territorial elements in the appropriation of urban space. The logic employed in planning urban spaces produces a kind of "standardised city" that pays little attention to the interwoven social web and its significance and importance in

providing for good living and well-being in cities.

As Brazilian cities have colour, the racial-ethnic element should be considered in public policies and theoretical debate on urban spaces, because the distinct social groups all have the right to the city and their particular ways of being and doing are cultural patrimonies that need to be preserved.

The *quilombola* communities are predominantly Afro-Brazilian. Although they have their Brazilian roots in various forms of resistance to slavery, they are not just relics of the past but something alive and modern forming a political ethnic identity which collectively maintains its traditions and connects the present to both the past and the future.

The social groups making up this *quilombola* identity have been struggling for recognition in countries such as Brazil and Colombia for many years, but more actively so since the 1970s when constitutional guarantees of their rights were introduced into the respective Constitutions.

Their battle for acceptance concerns



principally the guarantee of ownership of their traditional lands and the elaboration of public policy specifically adapted to the *quilombola* lifestyle. The *quilombola* territories are seen by the inhabitants not just as a mere physical space, but also as the *locus* where traditions, memories, religion, relationship with the natural environment and many other subjective aspects are lived out daily in the communities.

This ongoing struggle explains the many forms of occupation of the city as well as the challenge to consider the right to the city in its multiple aspects. The urban-rural dichotomy is gradually changing as shown by the presence of quilombo communities in major Brazilian capitals (*Rio de Janeiro* and *Porto Alegre*, for example) and in rural areas of the smaller towns and cities.

The *quilombolas* communities and their demands for recognition symbolise the reformulation of politics because they introduce new themes and manners of political action characterising what is sometimes called the "politicalisation of culture". Furthermore, the differences and the existence of a multicultural society confirm the great importance of the new political mobilisations of social movements such as the *quilombolas*.

In addition, the quilombola communities practice lifestyles and non-mercantile relationships with natural resources that are very different from the individual and private definitions of modern property-holding systems. This raises once again the discussion on national projects that give priority to development based on capitalist macro-projects, while ignoring other forms of "doing and living" and their potential.

The struggle for recognition of the quilombola communities contributes a new element to the abstractly-constructed idea of the "Right to the Cities" by suggesting a city containing spaces conceived from an ethnic standpoint. This battle questions some current ideas for the city as intervention or merely as a planning exercise.

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COHRE – the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions – is an independent non-governmental organisation acting internationally to promote and protect the right to adequate housing for everyone, everywhere. Since 1994, the organisation has promoted the search for, and the implementation of, solutions to problems such as the lack of housing and inadequate housing conditions. For this purpose, COHRE supports entities that work with human rights and itself acts with various intergovernmental departments in its registered consultative

status with the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of American States (OAS). COHRE also holds observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

To implement its actions, COHRE is organised by thematic programmes (the Right to Water Programme, the Litigation Programme, the Women and Housing Rights Programme, the Housing and Property Restitution Programme and the Global Forced Evictions Programme) as well as

regional programmes. These latter are divided into: the Africa Programme (COHRE-CA), the Asia and the Pacific Programme (COHRE-CAPP), Europe (with special projects), and the COHRE Americas Programme (COHRE-CAP).

Since 2002 the COHRE Americas Programme has been working in defense of the right to adequate housing in the region through capacity building programmes, legal assistance and promoting the right to land of minority groups and low income communities in informal

settlements. CAP also carries out activities at the national and international level, including fact-finding missions, litigation, monitoring and the promotion of campaigns against the practice of forced evictions.

The COHRE Americas Programme organises these and other activities in certain target countries where it works jointly with local entities. The countries where these activities are being conducted currently are Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Honduras.

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