

Electoral Process for HIC President (2019-2023) – [Adriana Allen – Campaign Statement]
Looking back – looking forward

The world around us is not just urbanizing fast, but under increasing inequality and uncertainty. The challenges we witness, rely more than ever on the muscle of global networks like HIC - a network with a unique history, capacity and an accountable international structure that links diverse but like-minded collectives of civil society organizations, social movements and individuals across the whole world, to tackle the multiples battles we face.

Before sharing what I believe are some of the strategic challenges ahead of HIC, I would like to start with a personal story. Born in Argentina in the early 1960s, my grandparents were European migrants who left the continent at the turn of the XX century to escape hunger. They were illiterate but found there the opportunity to call a place ‘home’ and to call themselves ‘citizens’: entitled to vote, to access land and to work towards a better future. My parents only managed to complete primary education, while my brother and I were able to go through university, and in my case postgraduate education abroad under public sponsorship. This trajectory of change was not possible due to wealth accumulation but rather due to the social mobility offered in my native country at the time through immigration rights, social housing, and universal public health and education. I am also a migrant, a single mum of three teenagers, a pedagogue, academic and activist. Over the last 35 years, I had the invaluable chance to work with women and men, girls and boys across Africa, Asian, Latin America and the Middle East, struggling to fulfil their right to call a place ‘home’, to access land and housing, food security, water, sanitation and energy, health provision, dignified livelihoods and social mobility through education.

Both through my personal and work trajectory, what I admire the most about HIC, is its extraordinary capacity to champion the recognition of those who make cities thriving environments, while facing the constant challenges of exclusion, stigmatization and marginalization through coercive and subtle means of discrimination. Furthermore, the Coalition has maintained the quality to play this role without compromising the values that make HIC distinctive from other global networks: its commitment to remain an inclusive, decentralized, horizontal, non-bureaucratic and democratic global platform that attracts respect from local, national and international organisations. Maintaining, consolidating, deepening and expanding the invaluable role and unique attributes of HIC calls for active engagement with a number of challenges and opportunities:

❖ **Linking HIC advocacy framings with other calls for justice**

HIC has historically championed a strong and focused call for the recognition of the Right to Housing, expanded in the 1990s to the defence of social production of habitat and the Right to the City. As time goes by, we witness new and often competing agendas and framings on what change is required and why. While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Habitat III New Urban Agenda – or what should rather be the ‘New Habitat Agenda’ - aim at providing a holistic orientation for change, many adjectives come to qualify the attributes of such change, yet reference to ‘justice’ is still rare across international agendas. In parallel, we witness the emerging recognition of challenges such as climate change and massive social mobilization across young generations to fight for climate justice. Simultaneously, climate change is rapidly becoming a technology and a narrative to legitimize massive evictions and displacements on the ground. These processes call for constantly re-assessing the shifting map of international priorities and imperatives as well as emerging sites of social mobilization, in order to maintain a critical perspective on international framings, as well as to seek alliances with other networks fighting for justice.

❖ **From the finalization of housing to the ‘financialisation of life’**

HIC has a strong and unique voice in denouncing the ‘finalization of housing’ as a process that erodes the right to the city, in which housing is treated as - in the words of John Turner - a ‘verb’ not a ‘thing’. Yet, we witness a wider process at play: the ‘financialisation of life’ through the commodification of everything – from land and

housing to water and sanitation, from health and education to food, from our labour to the curtailed opportunities to support the social infrastructures of care that are essential to the social production of habitat. This process extends to the instrumentalisation of participation. While I am fully aware that the multiple fronts at which life is becoming increasingly commodified are well known by HIC and its members, I believe we still face the challenge to articulate all these dimensions in the way we work on the ground and the messages and battles we fight at national, regional and international scales.

❖ **Acknowledging the full diversity of experiences encompassed in the social production of habitat**

Unlike decades ago, gender has now become part of the everyday vocabulary used in international debates to refer to the multiple experiences of those struggling for their rights in urban and rural areas. Nevertheless, we still witness a tendency to homogenise their experiences. The challenges faced by women and men in the social production of habitat are defined at the intersection of their gender, age, class, ethnicity, faith, ability and tenure security. Yet, many of these identities often fall through the net inadvertently. For instance, migration flows are heavily feminized in many countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, as girls and young women are increasingly flocking to cities seeking employment in sweat factories or as domestic workers and dwelling as tenants in informal settlements. Children and adolescents living in urban poverty – girls and adolescent girls in particular--tend to experience more deprivation than others, and typically have limited access to opportunities for voice and agency, both within the places where they work and communities where they live. Similarly, many countries across Latin America and the Caribbean are undergoing an increase in the population of older adults living in a context of poverty and income inequality, in which health problems are typically compounded by economic difficulties that aggravate the situation for many senior citizens. Yet, our emerging understanding of their reality, usually omits a disaggregation of what it means to age under these conditions as a woman or a man. Many similar examples could be cited to remind ourselves of the major outstanding challenges to achieving gender equality, a priority singled out in Agenda 2030 in the form of SDGs 5 and 11. HIC has great strengths in building and applying intersectional lenses – sensitive to age, gender, class, ethnicity, religion and tenure security. Yet changing trends force us to constantly adjust and sharpen our vision to support meaningful change for all.

❖ **Finding a common meaning and cause across faith and race**

We cannot ignore the fact that faith is becoming a divisive factor and a division that is used to obscure common struggles and reinforce conflict and calls for control across the world. When I reflect on what I hear from collectives of the urban poor across different geographies, I see faith-based groups increasingly becoming the main reference for those struggling for a dignified life, both in urban and rural areas. This is not in itself a bad thing, but while some faith groups pursue a common liberation message, others build identities that divide the aspirations of grassroots actors. We witness similar challenges in relation to race. Both faith and race clashes and differences are being increasingly used to legitimize societal calls for fear, securitization and control upon the 'other', compromising peaceful coexistence and mobility, and creating massive displacements. It is our duty to challenge the artificial boundaries that divide common claims, struggles and experiences, while respecting their diversity.

❖ **Reflecting on HIC pedagogies and ways of seeking change**

HIC members are unified by common principles, while deploying multiple ways of learning the changing realities of local communities on the ground and of how to support their quest for transformative change. I see these ways of 'doing things' as HIC pedagogies. Much can be learnt from engaging in a collective self-reflection and exchange on what these pedagogies entail and how they work and change. This involves taking stock of what we

do, learning together from historical and emerging ways of doing things, as a means to build and strengthen bridges across generations, cultures and geographies. I know such exchanges are common practice across HIC members within many regions, though there is probably room to foster similar practices across regions and to distil shared principles. I see this as an essential undertaking to strengthen HIC's collective identity, while celebrating the diversity of its pedagogic practices, its ways of doing things differently, under a common cause.

I am aware that the above represent just some of the many challenges that the Coalition faces to retain and strengthen its work and message in aligned resonance with the work of its diverse membership. I look forward to engaging in a collective assessment and open exchange on the challenges, opportunities and responsibilities that lie ahead for HIC.

Adriana Allen

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