

INTERVENTION AT THE APFSD SESSION 5 ON MAKING CITIES INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE: REGIONAL PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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On behalf of urban poor communities, slum dwellers and homeless people, I'd like to thank you Mr. Chair and the UNESCAP for providing space for the urban poor, especially the most vulnerable urban dwellers. I speak here hopeful that our collective perspective and recommendations as civil society be included in the whole process of making the APFSD regional road map and in crafting a new urban agenda.

We feel encouraged that the SDGs and the "New Urban Agenda" as delivered by member-states in this forum point at combating urban exclusion and facilitating inclusion. We also agree that the rights of all to universal access to quality basic services should be promoted.

But amid the continued push for neoliberal policies in the name of economic growth, we are very doubtful that urban poverty will be significantly addressed by 2030.

The promotion of public-private partnerships in the SDGs and the new urban agenda is very concerning as our communities have seen and felt that private sector's priority for profit maximization undermines the people's welfare and community development. It has allowed dislocation of poor people from livelihood and housing, higher prices and taxes, and inaccessibility of urban infrastructures and basic social services including education, health, housing and water.

Public interest must be ensured over that of private corporations. Decent work and living wages, as opposed to contractualization and the flexibilisation of labor, must be prioritized. Social services and sustainable livelihoods must be ensured by governments.

Human settlements should be recognized as a public good and service integral to realizing the human right to adequate housing instead of privatized mechanisms. Forced evictions, demolitions and displacements must end now. Governments must have resettlement plans for the urban poor, on-site development of local communities, and access to adequate, affordable, and sustainable housing with adequate employment and basic social services.

We are deeply concerned that the goals and the urban agenda do not prioritize the need to sustainably develop the rural areas to resolve landlessness. This is especially troubling amid a political backdrop where farmers fighting for their lands and relief from food deprivation are met with brutal state violence, as we've recently seen in the Philippines. Agenda 2030 is similarly silent on the corporate control of vast swaths of rural areas that leads to land and resource grabs as well as environmental destruction and the depletion of non-renewable resources. These issues have historically caused rural-urban migration, which is now compounded by climate change.

We agree that human settlements be made more resilient, but at the same time we should address the root causes of environmental and economic crises.

Lastly, we urge you to look at the urban poor, slum dwellers, migrants, informal sector and the homeless as rights-holders, contributors and partners in development of cities and not as urban blight. Sustainable urban development must involve the participation first and foremost of the urban poor if you indeed do not want to leave anyone behind.

Thank you.