

DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO HOUSING INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE CRISIS OF HOUSING IN HAITI MAY 19-21, 2011

We, organizations of survivors living in internally displaced persons' [IDP] camps, as well as social and grassroots organizations, assembled for three days (May 19-21, 2011) at Fany Villa in Port-au-Prince to reflect on the problem of housing within Haiti's longstanding crisis. Following an exchange around the theme "January 12: Nightmares, Reality and Dreams," we state:

1. We commend the initiative taken by FRAKKA [the Force for Reflection and Action in Housing] and other partners to host this forum, which allowed us to hear the testimonies of many camp residents and to exchange views on housing and other issues being faced in the camps. This exchange allowed us to better understand the root of the problems we face and to issue resolutions and an action plan that will guide our efforts during 2011 - 2012.
2. We heard a number of testimonies about the living conditions in IDP camps, which demonstrated that we cannot continue to live in conditions wherein our basic rights as individuals and communities are violated every day. We heard testimonies of the many diseases contracted by people living under tarps, of the pain of women suffering from all kinds of violence, and of children who cannot attend school or plan for their futures in these conditions. We see how the planned camps (like Corail) have become hell and do not offer conditions within which life can flourish.
3. We discovered that most of us in the camps are living in fear. We live under the threat of eviction, as both the government and private landowners are maneuvering (even setting fire to some camps) to force us out, even though we have nowhere else to go. These acts are crimes against our very lives and are in violation of our fundamental rights. According to an IOM [International Organization for Migration] report published in March 2011, more than 47,000 people have already been evicted and 165,977 more face the threat of eviction. We resolve to fight against these evictions and to ask for reparations for those who have been victims of forced displacement, which is a human rights violation.
4. During this forum, we were pleased to hear the testimonies and analysis of friends from foreign countries like the United States (New Orleans and Miami), Dominican Republic, and Brazil on the struggle for housing rights and how they are carrying out this struggle in the international context (via the International Alliance for Inhabitants). We learned a lot about the way these friends are fighting and the victories they have achieved. It was with joy and with much respect that we

received MST (Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement), Take Back the Land, COOP HABITAT, and Other Worlds. We salute the determination of our friends and the movements they represent.

5. Throughout the forum, we saw how the Haitian government, ruling classes, and international institutions have not responded to the housing problems that millions of Haitians have long faced and which have become more serious since January 12, 2010. Most of the people who lost their homes in the earthquake do not have the means to rebuild. Sixteen months after the catastrophe on January 12th, 700,000 people are living in the streets and many more families are living in horrible conditions in shantytowns. Many people had to return to damaged houses that could collapse at any time. We reject false solutions such as the distribution of tarps or building of temporary shelters – shelters that cannot resolve the issues at stake, that do not protect us and that do not respect our dignity and the lifestyles of our families.

6. We resolve to continue the struggle to force the state to define a global policy on housing that guarantees the right of all Haitians to have a home to live in that respects their dignity as people. The government should create an office to start housing construction projects to respond to our needs.

Therefore:

- The government must define a land use policy for the country. We must not forget that this has been poorly defined since long before January 12. Before the earthquake, 80% of the population in Port-au-Prince was living in 20% of the land. We want housing discrimination, in all forms, to end, and for distinctions [in government services and infrastructure] between rich and poor neighborhoods, to end. All neighborhoods should be places where people can live in dignity and security. We reject all the wealth and infrastructure being concentrated in only some parts of the city. We also reject the reconstruction of the nation's land only to create free trade zones.

- The Parliament must draft and vote on a law to guarantee the right to housing in this nation, as outlined in Article 22 of the Haitian Constitution of 1987, as well as the in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This law must define the codes that all people must respect for housing construction (soil, materials, distance, basic services, environment, aesthetics, etc.);

- The government must look for and acquire land through expropriation [eminent domain] so that there is sufficient space to respond to the housing needs of the population;

- The population must participate in decision-making regarding where new houses and neighborhoods are being constructed. We have to say what Port-au-Prince we want to build. Those that come from other countries, with plans already drawn up, cannot say this for us.

- We are ready to give our contribution (in financing, work, and materials) so that we can create housing that respects people's dignity. However, the government must finance construction projects to let us get housing as soon as possible, even if we pay a reasonable rent over several years. The

government must immediately create a special fund to finance public housing. There is a lot of money being wasted that could be invested instead to respect the population's right to housing. The budget of MINUSTAH [U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti] for only 12 months could allow the construction of more than 77,000 houses and give nearly 400,000 people respectable homes to live in.

- Homes and land are the source of life that allow people to live, grow, be safe, and help families to reproduce. The government and our communities must take all measures for these resources to remain a source of life, instead of turning them into merchandise so the bourgeoisie can make tons of money off our backs.

- The government must hurry so that all those without a lot of means can get housing that respects their human dignity. Institutions like BNC (National Bank of Commerce) and the commercial banks should put in place special programs to help the population repair or build good houses, with particular attention paid to those with few economic means and those with disabilities.

- The government must implement rent control, since rents have risen up to 17 times higher than before [the earthquake] and [sometimes] must be paid in US dollars. We must have this law to keep speculators from making millions off of our misery and despair.

- The government must guarantee security as to where we live. We do not want houses built one on top of the other, or houses where we live to crash into each other each time one falls down because they are too crowded. We must find housing where we can breathe easily. They must be guaranteed against all the risks that threaten our country. Land use must be based in prevention of the biggest risks (earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, floods, tsunamis, etc.) The government must develop education and training programs so we can prepare for these and other risks.

- The right to housing cannot be separated from our other rights: the right to work, the right to health, the right to education, the right to leisure, the right to a clean environment, etc. All of these rights are interconnected. This means that all house construction must be done in a way that facilitates our enjoyment of all of these rights. Camp Corail Cesselesse is the worst example of this, considering how they decided to corral the population like animals, without reflecting on the connection between all economic, social and cultural rights.

- We ask the Haitian Parliament to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as a tool that can strengthen our struggle to defend our rights.

- In all house construction projects, they must plan for public spaces that allow our communities to have and develop collective activities, such as: taking in some fresh air, playing sports, having meetings and assemblies, and carrying out cultural activities such as theater, painting expositions, etc. Public spaces must have a special management. There must be special attention for the use of all coastal land to protect the environment, the mangroves and carry out cultural activities that are connected to the ocean resources.

- We resolve to create village communities where each family has its own space, and where the community has space to engage in collective activities. We believe that cooperative housing is a viable alternative that can protect the right to housing for those who do not have great economic means.

- We want houses that respect our local architectural style and that use as much local materials as possible such as clay, marble, bamboo, etc. We want beautiful houses that represent our culture, houses that give the community life and that help us maintain dialogue between ourselves, houses that have yards and gardens where we can grow vegetables and medicinal plants, houses that respect the dignity of our bodies with the little bit of privacy that everyone needs. We want houses that provide space for us to live as families with neighbors in the *lakou* [traditional communal courtyard] where we can share food and daily activities. We must defend our local architectural heritage.

- Each neighborhood must have a cultural center to educate children and youth on the values of Haitian culture and the history of the nation. These must have special children's activities. In each neighborhood, there must be space that will aid us in constructing our collective memory as a people. In this sense, it is important for us to construct monuments to remember all our brothers and sisters that perished in the earthquake of January 12, 2010.

- In the houses we are building and in the collective infrastructure, we must remember people with disabilities and facilitate their mobility and daily activities.

- Every housing construction project must give special attention to the rights of women. It is good, whenever possible, for the title to the house to carry the name of the husband and wife. In inheritance, (when property is separated) men must not benefit disproportionately to women. In housing law, the government must protect the rights of women living alone or in a family where a husband has multiple wives. Women and men have the same right to housing. Our organizations must struggle against all forms of physical and moral violence that women are subjected to in the home. Work in the home must be shared equally between men and women. We request a special training program to allow women to be integrated into all levels of the construction work being carried out.

- We denounce the corruption scandals in the management of housing programs; corruption in the government, in NGOs [non-governmental organizations], and in the ICRH [Interim Commission for the Reconstruction of Haiti]. They must reinforce all the government offices and structures that address housing.

7. We resolve that:

- The time is ripe for the right to housing to be respected in our country.

- We will fight against forced evictions and against all forms of intimidation on the part of the government and landowners, who inflict more misery on us when they force us to move without providing alternative sites for housing. We ask all communities to organize in order to rapidly

circulate information regarding intimidation and threats, so that those that threatening the lives of our families can be taken to court.

- We will strengthen our organizations and reinforce the alliances amongst grassroots and social organizations. We will build a strong social movement that has the capacity to defend the interests of the exploited classes;

- We will make the struggle for housing a priority, and support homeless people and those living in camps in this struggle;

- We will disseminate information and conduct trainings across the country on the right to housing, and build organizational tools that will strengthen our struggle to force the government to respect these rights;

- We will join in the fight against all injustice and exploitation. We resolve to remain mobilized in the struggle to change our society and our government. This struggle must be aimed at constructing a new state that gives more importance to people's lives than to money, and that defends the interests of the exploited classes. It is only this kind of government that can respond in a real way to our demands for housing;

- We will join in the struggle for justice because we know the housing issue is linked to issues of employment, education, health, sanitation, electricity, transportation, communication, working conditions, land reform, environmental policy, etc.;

- We have resolved to stop considering housing as an issue that can be resolved on an individual or family basis. Only collective solutions can resolve access to land for us to build on, housing and rent speculation, environmental management, and neighborhood management;

- We will create training programs on radios, in churches, temples, and schools to make people aware of the importance of housing rights. We will organize trainings and debates in the camps and in popular [low-income] neighborhoods with children, youth, and adults. We will launch a special newsletter to disseminate information on what is happening in the camps and shantytowns;

- We will support the International Alliance of Inhabitants and other organizations fighting internationally to defend the right to housing. We resolve to participate in a week-long mobilization in October 2011, and we ask for a national day each year during which we celebrate the right to housing for all;

- We will ask all grassroots organizations and all other movements to mobilize with us on the housing issue so that we can achieve this dream of justice and liberty. We resolve to bring all of our forces together to overthrow the capitalist system, the bourgeois government, the government of landlords, the government that defends imperialist interests. We resolve to regain the sovereignty of our country in order to construct a society in which we can enjoy guaranteed access to housing and all our fundamental rights.

The camp representatives and organizations signatory to this resolution are: (there follow hundreds of signatures from at least 40 grassroots and non-governmental organizations, and at least 35 IDP camp committees)

Port-au-Prince, 21 May 2011

Translated by Alexis Erkert and Monica Dyer.

