

**WSF 2006:  
INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE 'ZERO EVICTIONS' CAMPAIGN, TOWARDS  
GLOBAL UNITY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE FIGHT FOR HOUSING  
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Within the framework of the World Social Forum 2006 in Caracas, the International Alliance of Inhabitants successfully staged an international seminar called 'Zero Evictions Campaign : towards global unity among social movements fighting for housing'.

The seminar was attended by more than a hundred delegates representing different social organisations from 15 countries (Venezuela, Peru, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Canada, France, Italy, Brazil, U.S.A., Colombia, Nicaragua, India, Spain). They debated their diverse problems and possible solutions in the field of housing and habitat long and hard, and with great enthusiasm.

At the start of the event IAI co-ordinator Cesare Ottolini stated that the Alliance emerged so that settlers can make their voices heard, since it is they who create the cities and therefore they have the right to express an opinion regarding the fate of the same. To this effect, he underlined the mobilisations promoted by the Alliance to stop evictions on a global scale, as well the commitments acquired by authorities in Rome and Kenya in relation to this. Ottolini insisted on the need to put an international system of alerts against evictions into operation and to create a People's Solidarity Fund to be controlled by the various social organisations, into which resources freed by cancelling foreign debt payments could be channelled.

The principal contributions and conclusions reached at the meeting include the following: Larry Alvarez, of the 'Rodrigueana' Social School in Venezuela, stressed the need to search our memories for the foundations of our popular culture which is expressed in, among other things, the ways we construct and inhabit our houses and our neighbourhoods. The Urban Land Committees raised the idea that the problem stems from the logic of the marketplace, according to which housing and life are commodities, which leads to the proliferation of evictions among those who don't have sufficient economic resources to build a dwelling through the mechanisms of the marketplace. Since it is impossible to stop an eviction by legal means, social pressure is the only way.

Roger Muro, the Peruvian representative of the Urban Initiative Group, proposed a DESC optional protocol which would oblige the Peruvian state to face a lawsuit over non-compliance with the recommendations effected by the UN Special Rapporteur for adequate housing, Miloon Kothari.

For his part, Pedro Franco, of the Dominican Republic, considered that the strategy for upholding the right to housing, often violated in our countries despite appearing in our constitutions, involves the unity of the Popular Urban Movement and the construction of a common space or Urban Way.

A Haitian representative emphasised the violent situation of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic where they don't legally exist in the eyes of the authorities in that country.

The Puerto Rican representative declared that in his country evictions began with the Spanish Conquest which eliminated the indigenous population, later replaced by the United States Marines and now the Development Companies who evict whole settlements in order to construct military installations, motorways, tourism complexes and shops. The island municipality of Viaques, and the communities adjoining the State University of Puerto Rico, Caimito and Santurce, are examples of this. Faced with this situation it was considered that we should defend the right to question and to participate in the decision-making processes, educate and train communities to inquire critically into any political or social action which affects them, and the urgent need for an urban and rural arrangement to reflect the needs of the population.

Cristina Almazan, of UCISV-Veracruz Mexico, insisted on the importance of creating a Unitarian urban process, local action for the settlement of families and of taking into our own hands the social production of housing and cities.

As a subject of debate, the conflict between the right to property and the right to decent housing was considered.

Finally, the co-ordinator of IAI reminded those present that of the earth's six billion inhabitants, one billion are threatened by eviction, and for that reason he exhorted

delegates to promote the 'zero evictions' campaign which involves a joint network and initiative.

Primarily, to create antennae in each country to detect threatened evictions, put it on the net, confront others and defend the right to housing at the local and global level.

Since governments offer proof that they lack sufficient resources to implement even the Millennium Development Goals, IAI proposes supporting the People's Funds for Land and Housing through the cancellation of debt in return for socially controlled housing policies. And, therein, giving rise to UN-AGFE missions to countries where there is the danger of forced evictions occurring among low-income populations.

In order to bring about this alert system it is essential to have unity among urban social movements, to build strong alliances within the 'altermundista' (alternative globalists) movement, in particular with Via Campesina, and also to form a solid partnership with local authorities and progressive governments. Naturally, this relies on the cultivation of a new type of community leader, strongly anchored in the social fabric but with an awareness of the challenges which globalisation presents to individual regions. Therefore the education and research proposed by the Popular Urban University, which IAI is supporting, are of primordial importance.

In the case of threatened evictions, each link in the chain will have to react with solidarity: calls, marches, negotiations with counterparts.

At the end of the event, to show the strength of this chain, the delegates all took each other's hands and we formed a chain to express our commitment to defending the right to housing in all our countries, regardless of borders.