STATEMENT OF THE WOMEN AND SHELTER STRATEGIZING GROUP AT THE NGO FORUM BEIJING '95, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, BEIJING, CHINA.
(draft developed on 7 September 1995 and presented to Wally N'Dow on 8 September)

WE, A SUPER-COALITION OF WOMEN FROM AROUND THE WORLD WORKING ON HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES WITH A GENDER FOCUS, representing women working in various areas of human settlements develop, on different levels and from every region of the world, have met every day at the NGO Forum Huairou '95 to share our experiences and concerns, and strategies for our collective efforts at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, towards the HABITAT II Conference in Istanbul in June 1996 and beyond.

We reaffirm the need to make housing and habitat issues central to the women’s agenda and for gender issues to be critical concern within the housing and habitat movement;

We reassert that women play a central role in meeting the housing and habitat needs of ourselves and of our families an in creating a healthy and safe living environment for their households and yet our roles are often not recognised nor respected by the cultural codes and practices of our communities or the laws of our countries;

We recognise the urgent need to address women’s housing and habitat concerns with concrete commitments at community and government levels to include women’s full participation at all levels of decision making with support, recognition, and respect;

We are appalled by the very limited focus that housing and habitat issues have been given both within the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women and within the agenda of the NGO Forum Beijing ’95; and,

We urge national governments and UN Agencies, and in particular, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), to immediately begin to redress the aforementioned situation in the upcoming HABITAT II conference, its preparations, the proposed Global Plan of Action and NGO Forum, and to play a catalytic role in ensuring a clear and consistent gender focus within all human settlements and urban development strategies that emerge.

In doing so, there are several key demands that must first be taken into account in the broader context of shelter for all and sustainable human settlement in an urbanizing world. They are:

• that housing is a fundamental human right, and that unless this basic right is recognised and enforced, poor women can never fully benefit nor participate in development and empowerment processes;

• to develop policies and programmes that ensure women’s equality in shelter and habitat;

• that all forced evictions whether perpetrated by public or private agencies must be halted immediately, and that forced eviction be recognized as a gross violation of human rights;

• that indigenous, rural and urban housing and habitat concerns be recognised as being inextricably linked, and that the exploitation, displacement and neglect of rural resources and people to meet the disproportionate needs of urban centres be redressed immediately; and,

• that current economic policies such as SAP’s that commercialise land and services, further marginalise the poor, and increase the burden of poor women, be halted immediately.

We have collectively discussed our main issues and concerns to be taken up both in the Beijing and Istanbul UN Conferences. They are:

1. The model of economic development: Environmental sustainability and the needs of the poor should be central to the plans for economic growth. Furthermore the planning process of human settlements must ensure mechanisms for civil society participation in negotiating development priorities, financing, budgets and scheduling;
2. **Women’s fundamental right to own, inherit, control and sustain tenure of land and buildings**, on an equal basis with men, must be treated as fundamental human right. Although women may have legal rights to land and property, in many societies customary laws prevent women from exercising our rights. Different forms of property control also need to be encouraged i.e. sharing, cooperative rental and so on.

3. **The question of homelessness**: Women often become homeless as a result of physical or sexual violence either in the home or as a result of caste related, ethnic, religious fundamentals and military conflict.

4. **Equal access to affordable credit for housing**, infrastructure and income-generating activities, for women as well as for men is urgently required;

5. **Specific training and job development** for women in order to enable us to better qualify for jobs within the human settlements development fields needed;

6. **Capacity-building in gender awareness** for women and men, in order for us to who have a clear gender perspective and be capable of communicating this perspective to others in order to build up capacity among human settlement development practitioners; in the process; and,

7. **Research and development** of specific "gender-sensitive tools" for use among habitat development practitioners;

Recognising the above critical concerns the Women and Shelter Strategising Group has developed an initial set of actions that we believe must be taken in order to begin to redress the above:

1. **THE MODEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The current global trend to reduce state responsibility for ensuring the basic needs and rights of the poor must be reversed through strategies such as land banks, the continued responsibility for services and public infrastructure and ensuring that there is adequate funding for public housing programmes for both individual and collective ownership and rental;

Women need to be involved from the outset in all development initiatives and in the planning and implementation of urban development and housing programmes;

Governments must regulate land prices and restrict profit-making and land speculation; and,

Governments must provide funds and support for universal access to:

a) Information on affordable housing development policy and implementation;

b) Housing development policy and project monitoring and evaluation; and

c) Housing development research.

2. **WOMEN’S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO OWN, INHERIT, CONTROL AND SUSTAIN TENURE OF LAND AND BUILDINGS**

Where they do not already exist, laws to ensure women’s rights of inheritance, ownerships and land tenure need to be enacted; and,

Educational and capacity-building programmes need to be developed for communities, CBOs and NGOs to raise awareness of women’s legal and other human rights.

3. **THE QUESTION OF HOMELESSNESS**

The reasons for homelessness need to be analyzed and publicized so that appropriate short and long term strategies can be developed to provide affordable housing for women, especially those who are survivors of
violence, or who have been abandoned, widows or who are female heads of households;
Local governments must encourage and facilitate the development of both home ownership and rental projects which are appropriate to meet local housing needs;
Local governments must develop and implement housing strategies which ensure the provision of housing for the homeless;
Governments must guarantee financing at the lowest possible rates for affordable housing development and maintenance, specifically for low-income people;

4. **EQUAL ACCESS TO CREDIT FOR HOUSING**

Lending institutions need to design mechanisms to make housing affordable and specifically available to women and appropriate to our needs;
Lending institutions need to recognise that community-based organizations may act as guarantors for individual women;
Local governments, financial institutions, CBOs, NGOs and individuals need to develop creative partnerships to make credit available to low-income women;
Local credit unions must be created and the long term effect of debt on individual and local institutions must be carefully considered;
Governments must guarantee the affordability of universal housing by instituting such programmes to ensure that people pay no more than 25-30% of income for standard basic housing expense;
Government must establish a "Community Development Fund" equally available to local government, NGOs and CBOs after the model of Thailand's Urban Community Development Office (UCDO); with access for women as well as for men;
Community mortgage programmes that are accessible to poor women must be encouraged.

5. **SPECIFIC TRAINING AND JOB DEVELOPMENT**

It is essential to emphasize training women in the construction process as well as in urban planning, management, housing development/project administration, maintenance and finance; include women and client/use participation in technical project planning and design including architecture, layout and material selection of materials.
For housing development planning, priority should be placed on financing and community investment strategies for housing projects which maximise the use of local resources and which encourage balanced economic development and job creation;
The use of local labour, skills and appropriate building materials should be encouraged as a correct use of local resources.

6. **CAPACITY-BUILDING IN GENDER AWARENESS**

Ensure that at all levels of UN agencies and government officials, women and men, undergo gender training and updating of skills and knowledge to promote the development and implementation of housing and urban development programmes which serve women’s interests and needs as well as men’s;
UN agencies must be open to funding programmes that develop women’s skills in leadership, management, advocacy and coalition building to ensure their central roles within community, local governments, national, regional and international decision making;
Development agencies should demand a gender focus in all programmes related to housing for all and sustainable human settlement development in an urbanizing world. Support should be withheld from those countries who do not give equal rights to women.
7. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIFIC "GENDER-SENSITIVE" TOOLS

UNCHS should facilitate research, development and dissemination of gender sensitive tools for use amongst settlements development practitioners including training manuals, publications on indicators and statistics related to women’s participation in human settlements development;

Development of gender-specific urban profiles and clear indicators of how policies and programmes impact the poor, and in particular, women at the level of community, city and country, should be enhanced.

Initiate an ongoing collation of statistics on how UN agencies and UN member states have implemented the Plans of Action ratified following previous UN Conferences and other commitments forged at an international level; and,

Development of indicators of progress in including women at all levels of decision making, including the UN agencies themselves, should be developed and monitoring of progress should be encouraged.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGO PARTICIPATION
AT THE HABITAT II CONFERENCE

1. Mechanisms should be developed to ensure the full participation of grassroots women in all processes leading up to and including the conference.

2. Mechanisms should be developed to ensure the full participation of community leaders in all processes leading up to the conference or by bringing the conference to them by creating "mini-Habitat II" conferences in cities around the world.

3. All information about Habitat II needs to be developed in a "user-friendly" language and visual forms.

4. Drawn from our experience of the NGO Forum in Huairou, the NGO Forum should be located close to the official UN Conference in Istanbul.

5. The plenary sessions should be held in a venue big enough to accommodate as many participants as possible and to have video facilities to allow the participants to be informed about the process and discussions.

6. There should be simultaneous translations available at the NGO Forum, the Official Conference, and the Special Events.

7. All documents should be available in all UN languages and widely disseminated to NGOs in good time before the conference, i.e. NOW!

8. NGOs should have enough exhibition space at the official UN Conference.

9. The NGO Forum should overlap the official conference by a few days for the NGOs to consolidate their positions.

10. There should be specific criteria for the accreditation of NGOs who wish to participate in the official conference.

11. All NGOs attending the NGO Forum should automatically be allowed to enter the official UN Conference. We want one pass for both events.

12. NGOs need to be involved in the preparatory process leading up to the Habitat II Conference.

13. There is a need for a "barrier-free" conference to ensure the full participation of the disabled.

14. There should be basic services such as day-care facilities at the site.

15. Financial support should be made available for NGOs to strengthen networking at all levels of the preparatory process up to and including the Conference.

16. Host facilities such as accommodations, transport, visa processing, should be easily accessible to all.