

**FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM OF SÃO PAULO
UNIVERSITY**

October, 10, 2009.

Mrs. Anna K. Tibaijuka,
Under-Secretary- General and Executive Diretor
United Nations Human Settlements Program – UN-HABITAT

First of all I would like to thank you for the distinction that was given to me through the invitation to be a member of the Advisory Board of the Global Research Network on Human Settlements (HS- Net) on March 2009. To be part of a team that is so highly qualified, and whose members come from several parts of the world, all having a common objective to collaborate with the mission of the United Nations Settlements Program, is indeed an incontrovertible motive of personal satisfaction.

As a participant of this board I initiated my tasks by means of an analysis and critical contribution to the pre-proposal for the 2011 Global report on Human Settlements, which I will forward to you within the time period agreed upon earlier on. However, some unexpected events have led me, with due respect, to present to you this letter of detachment of this council for the following reasons.

I was asked by several colleagues and research institutes, all of them active in the human settlements sector, about my availability and interest in order to be a candidate for the UN–HABITAT Lecture Award, which will be held during the next World Urban Forum on March 20-10 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. I accepted this honorable invitation to run for this nomination, being of course fully aware of the difficulty of effectively being nominated for this prize that is being disputed by so many highly distinguished researchers and professionals all over the world.

The next phase in the sequence of events was a message of the HS-Net Secretary, sent by Mr. Edlam Yemeru, through which I was informed that he was receiving countless support in favor of my nomination, but, considering my membership of the Council that directly participate in the selection process for the award, he was informing the signatories that I would not be able to compete for the Award in 2010. Moreover, in case I would not be part of the Council in 2012, I would have an opportunity to present my candidacy for that same year.

I understood, and I continue to do so, that the institutions that support me are not only looking for a way to honor me, but particularly to detach, in an international forum, some of the ideas and principles that many of us have been defending over the years, and which I will briefly summarize in the following observations.

The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – HABITAT – II, which took place in the city of Istanbul in 1996, changed the urban paradigm. Sophisticated and futuristic design exercises on cities could not resist in light of the denouncement and mounting evidence on the “urbanization of poverty”. The UN HABITAT program and the Global Reports on Human Settlements certainly performed a key role in the dissemination of this new paradigm in the years that followed.

In September 2000, one hundred and eighty nine leaders of governments all over the world gathered during the Millennium Summit, and assumed responsibility with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that had been formulated by the system of the United Nations. In the Millennium Declaration world-wide elimination of poverty and

famine by the year 2015 was put as a priority, also defining targets and monitoring indicators.

It should be acknowledged that progress has been made in the recognition of the reality of cities. Both cities and local governments have world-wide become part of the political agenda. The degree of community participation and the empowerment of neighborhoods have significantly increased in scale. In many countries, we are witnessing a “participatory fever” driven by the poor, supported by Non Governmental Organizations, and which are often focused on concrete issues at the neighborhood level; participation and poverty alleviation have become “mainstream” jargon of both many NGOs and governments.

However, and in spite of all these advances, our cities have not improved. To the contrary, in the larger part of low income countries the slum population actually increased, public transportation deteriorated, epidemics proliferated and, not coincidentally (as many of our colleagues would like us to believe), violence and unemployment also went up. Even in the developed countries the so-called street population, practically non-existing during the years of the welfare state, became a relevant challenge. Perhaps even more than our books, research and reports, cinema has revealed the crueler side of an urban scenario where solidarity and childhood are decadent.¹ We are facing a situation characterized by the absence of hope in the future, particularly among the young, whose values are increasingly being determined by the *fetiché* of consumerism. As a matter of fact, the universal and driving force of consumerism, which includes the architecture of the spectacle, has penetrated the minds and hearts of a larger part of mankind, which is still living in poverty, and in pre-modern conditions, without any access to basic rights such as water, basic sanitation, housing, health, and which is nevertheless co-existing with sophisticated electronic gadgets. The power of the market is subjugating.

This is not exactly a new perspective. The Global Report already dealt with issues such as social injustice, not only related to space, but also gender, ethnic diversity, environment and age, among some of the usual dimensions. Moreover, nothing happens by accident. In addition to many of the other structural drivers that are behind social exclusion, it is necessary to clearly point out the specific role of such factors as concentration of power, the unregulated expansion of private markets and the rise of neo-liberalism, among others, within the evolution of this urban tragedy, a process which during more than two decades could also count on the support of several international development agencies. The lack of prestige of the state and its social policies, the priority put on fiscal adjustment, the presence of excessively high real interest rates that trigger the escalation of unmanageable debts, the “rule of law” of cost recovery for essential urban services, the privatizations, the downsizing of the regulatory framework, provided a profound impact on the urban scenario. Land, whether urban or rural, is again performing a key role in globalization, both stimulating the exclusion of farmers and indigenous people, in addition to the increase of urban social-spatial segregation, thereby providing additional challenges to local governments that aim to provide low income housing. The paradigm of car mobility (which includes the production, refinery, and the distribution of polluting fossil fuels) is challenging every existing proposal with environmental and social rationality, and is nevertheless rapidly up-scaling its operations, specifically in light of the subsidies that have been provided after the crises of September 2008. The urgency revealed by the IPCC 2007 is demanding more incisive measures that will go beyond the (although considerable) list

¹ Movies such as “City of God” (Brazilian), “Tsotsi” (South African), “Slumdog Millionaire” (Indian) and the “The Cosntant Gardener”, among other examples.

of ad-hoc best practices. It is a challenging task, but absolutely necessary to separate discourse and urban marketing from what really counts.

I have decided to leave the prestigious Advisory Board of the Global Research Network on Human Settlements in order to maintain my candidacy for the HABITAT Lecture Award since this is a way of joining those voices, still relatively weak, of professionals, researchers and organizations all over the world, who are discontented with the vulnerability of the responses that have been offered for the problems that have already been pointed out by innumerable reports. Winning the award is not the main reason of my decision, as I hope it is clear. The unexpected support I have received from so many colleagues and research institutes does not allow me to simply ignore them. In my view, it is as honorable to participate in the HS-NET Board as to be part of the reconstruction process of civil society that needs to move out of the lethargy in which it in face of the world urban tragedy.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erminia Maricato', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Erminia Maricato
Full Professor.
University of Sao Paulo