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STATEMENT FROM THE STO TO IUT INTERNATIONAL MEETING 6th Oct. 2008.

Dear Tenant Colleagues,

Sadly the STO (Scottish Tenants Organisation) has not been able to send a delegate to this meeting today. However we send you our warmest regards, and the following summary of our organisation and activities, and we wish to send our goodwill and best wishes for the meeting today. We hope to attend future meetings. On this occasion the STO could not provide sufficient travel expenses to meet the cost of sending a delegate, but we are committed to working with our partners throughout Europe to build a future for sustainable, affordable, democratic, high quality housing.

The STO has been growing and developing our organisation since a downturn in 2005. We have been fighting for council tenants throughout Scotland, opposing stock transfer policies, and fighting for tenants right to choose their landlords and their future. The preferred option of the STO is municipal housing, known in the UK as council Housing.

To date this activity has led to us launching the campaign, Scotland's for Council Housing. The campaign calls for investment in those local authorities' housing stock where tenants have rejected stock transfer, and asserts that if the British Government is to write-off debt for stock transfer to landlords such as Housing Associations, then it should also do so for councils without having to transfer housing stock out of the public sector. Collective punishment for not towing the Government's line, we regard as unfair, and we are continuing to fight against it. Today colleagues from the STO will be lobbying the UK Chancellor, in Edinburgh (his own parliamentary constituency is in Edinburgh) to seek debt-write off to release £2.2 billion that could be invested in public sector, council housing for Scotland.

Aside from our national campaign, the STO has been entering into dialogue with Government, where we can. We held a recent meeting with Housing Minister, Stewart Maxwell. Our submission on the Scottish Government's white paper, Firm Foundations (while we welcomed the commitment to building new council housing) detailed our critique of the new Government's plans.* We continue to favour entering into dialogue where we can, to represent tenants.

Independent tenants organisations are however meeting with problems, in terms of entering into meaningful dialogue with policy makers, and landlords. There has been a process that has been underway now for some time of only consulting with 'Registered Tenants Organisations' (a process whereby the landlord and the Government recognise a tenants association, but one where tenants groups must meet certain criteria to be considered), and indeed a new 'national engagement framework' has been established whereby the Government consults with regional networks (which do not correspond to local authorities, or to specific landlord units), and with no-one else. We do not believe that this process has been established in the spirit of dialogue, and we continue to make strenuous representations on behalf of tenants and tenant's organisations across Scotland for the right to be consulted on matters affecting their homes and communities.

Finally, we commend to the meeting our manifesto. This reflects the view of the Scottish Tenants Organisation, which was formed out of tenant action against slum landlords in the early part of the 20th century.

The STO represents tenants of all tenures across Scotland.

It is run by and for tenants.

It negotiates with government, local authorities, housing associations, private landlords and other organisations and individuals on behalf of tenants, while remaining independent.

The STO fights for:-

1. Public investment in public owned housing. The STO will continue to campaign against stock transfer of any variety and scale, and for debt-writeoff and direct investment in improving existing council houses and building new ones. This includes the right for tenants to transfer back to council ownership.
2. An end to the removal of homes from the social rented sector through right-to-buy.
3. Replacement of schemes that subsidise home ownership (and push up house prices) with investment in public sector housing.
4. Efficient and good quality services for tenants of all tenures.
5. Housing association rents and service charges to be reduced to and held at affordable levels.
6. Controlled private rents and security of tenure, together with policies that reduce dependence on the private rented sector in favour of public housing.
7. An end to demolitions that are not supported by tenants and are not part of a programme to provide better housing for the tenants being displaced. The STO's opposition to stock transfer includes opposition to effective transfer through the demolition of council stock and its replacement with other tenures.
8. Affordable rents that are calculated so as to leave those on low incomes with enough money to afford a decent quality of life.
9. Proactive planning policies that ensure that social housing is available in good central positions and is not driven to perimeter estates.
10. Genuine tenant involvement in running their homes through independent tenant and community organisations.

We wish you every success with the meeting today, and we hope to play a more proactive role in the IUT, in the future.

Yours faithfully,
Iain MacInnes
Secretary STO

* This is online here: <http://snipurl.com/firmfoundations>