

IUT congress 2007

The future of rental housing is always on the agenda of the IUT

By Magnus Hammar, IUT

The almost 100 delegates from 26 countries at the IUT congress in Berlin, September 20-23, all participated with great enthusiasm and contributed to an overall high spirit that characterized the congress.

Ms Ingeborg Junge-Reyer, Mayor of Berlin, opened the congress by committing herself and the city of Berlin to retain the important and large rental sector in Berlin.

Dr. Klaus Töpfer, former Executive Director of the UN Centre for Human Settlements in Nairobi and also former German Housing Minister, spoke about the importance of IUT not only working in developed countries but also in developing countries.

IUT President Mr Sven Carlsson highlighted the concrete proposal to establish an IUT representation in Brussels, with the European Union. IUT's expansion from one office, the Secretariat in Stockholm, to a second office in Brussels is historical, from an IUT perspective.

Dr. Franz-Georg Rips, Director as well as President of the German tenant organisation, the Deutscher Mieterbund e.V. said that Germany is a tenant country, with around 57 % of all households being tenants. But, the present government wants to increase ownership, at the same time as there increasing social polarisation and lack of affordable housing – 15 % of all German households need public housing assistance.

The congress warmly welcomed far-away delegates; Penny Carr and Pat Cora from the Tenants Union in Queensland, Australia, and Mr Ludger B. Nyoni who represented the tenants in Tanzania. Japan was represented by Mr Kazuo Takashima from the Japanese Tenants Association. Mr Michael Kane from the National Alliance of HUD Tenants represented USA. Prof. Yelena Shomina from Moscow said she was hoping to establish a tenants association in Russia.

Being an organisation that besides



Prof. Yelena Shomina, Russia.



Ludger B. Nyoni, TTA / Tanzania.



Penny Carr, TUQ / Australia.



Kazuo Takashima, JTA / Japan.



Dr. Franz-Georg Rips, DMB / Germany.

PHOTO: JÜRGEN SCHOO, DMB

promoting tenants' rights and affordable rental housing, IUT also promotes rental housing as a social commodity as such.

IUT strongly believes that rental housing should be an important component in every democratic society. Citizens must be given the possibility to choose from a variety of tenures; rental, co-operative in several forms, and from ownership.

Figures on housing give that rental housing is decreasing in almost all countries, in many countries sometimes to unsustainable levels below five percent of the total stock. Several reasons are to be found; tax benefits and subsidies for homeowners, "right to buy" schemes with subsidies, restitution in Central and East Europe, governments adopts the idea of an asset or property based welfare system, large scale selling of municipal housing to multi national investors.

Perhaps all of these reasons can be summarized as shifts in ideology? Today, all sectors, including the social sectors, are thought to be best provided for by the Market. Twenty years ago we expected social services to derive from state and government initiatives.

Privatisation and housing exclusion

Consequence and results from privatisation vary from country to country but can often be summarised as "housing exclusion" and rental housing becoming residual. States react to globalization as a cause to withdraw from policy regulation and reduce public spending and increase economic and labour market competitiveness. Low income households and immigrants get difficulties in finding housing, and homelessness increase. Poor homeowners can often not afford maintenance and renovation. Another consequence is reduced labour mobility, due partly to high transaction costs.

IUT, being politically not affiliated to any political ideology, does not take any standpoint in the issue whether affordable rental housing should be provided for by the public or the private sector – provided that the national legal systems guarantee a fair and transparent provision of affordable housing, giving each and everyone the right to enjoy decent living.