



## INTERNATIONAL UNION OF TENANTS' NETWORKING EVENT

**“Tenants make cities – cities need affordable rental housing!”**

World Urban Forum 6, 3 September 2012, Naples



The right to adequate housing is a fundamental right according to many international conventions and agreements, including the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25, and the European Social Charter, revised, article 31.

*“These declarations are not just for show, they have to be carried out in reality. But across Europe and all over the world, an increasing number of people are having big difficulties in finding decent housing. This causes exclusion, segregation, social problems and insufficient*

*security. It affects the quality of social services, health, children’s chances in life and adults’ job prospects. Lack of affordable housing is an obstacle to labour mobility and economic growth”* said **Sven Bergenstråhle** (IUT President), a statement which is particularly true for Italy.

As **Massimo Petterlin** (SICET) remarked, high rents hamper the mobility of young adults that seek a job in other cities.

Italy is one of the EU countries where home-ownership is most popular and encouraged by governments, *“though 500.000 new housing units stay unsold”*, as **Guido Piran** (SICET S-G) pointed out. The reason for this is that living in rental housing is not considered decent, there is a sort of stigmatisation of the rental sector in Italy. In addition to this, there is a process of commodification of housing: 250.000 public housing units have been sold in the last 20 years and no new investment have been made. *“What we need, is a new urban policy which responds to families' needs, through investments in the construction of new social rented housing and in the refurbishment of the existing housing stock”*, he added.

**Barbara Steenbergen** (IUT Brussels) pointed up the European Commission's ambivalence towards social housing: on the one hand, it sets affordable housing as top priority in its Annual Growth Survey 2012; on the other hand, it limits access to social housing *“to disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups”* in its Decision 2012/21/EU. This is against those Members States that provide social housing also for middle income groups. *“The Commission does not take into account the fact that tenants in the private market often end up spending half of their income for housing costs. The IUT is lobbying EU and national institutions to protect these groups that cannot afford renting a house at market prices”*, she said.

**Andrea Cozzolino** (MEP) presented a new initiative of the Socialists & Democrats group in the European Parliament that aims to provide new funds for urban

regeneration projects, including housing, within the next generation of structural funds (2014-2020).

**Claudio Acioly** (UN-HABITAT) explained that adequate housing for all can only be achieved if policies manage to bring solutions to scale, delivering a wide range of affordable housing opportunities in size, standard, typology, price and location. Moreover, new reforms in the housing sector should be based upon results of previous policies and accurate analysis of housing market trends. Improvisation is never good.

Finally, prof. **Marja Elsinga** (TU-DELFT) called for *“tenure-neutral policies”*: the main policy goal should be to provide adequate housing, not a particular tenure. *“The key issue in terms of security of tenure is affordability”*, she said. This means that public policies should not push people towards a certain type of housing tenure that does not suit their needs. *“100% homeownership is not realistic in urban areas, therefore a plentiful supply of rental housing is crucial for cities”*, she added. *“A tenure-neutral housing policy enables people to make a rational choice and help the housing market to function correctly”*.

**Magnus Hammar** (IUT S-G) wrapped-up the meeting by saying that *“a functioning housing market offers urban households a choice between tenures and the ability to change location, size and quality of accommodation when life circumstances change”*. Finally, *“raising the level of the affordable rental housing stock contributes to social inclusion”*.



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