

Habitat International Coalition
Statement on Afghanistan
Cairo, Egipto, 6 September 2005

During its General Assembly, in Cairo, on 6 September 2005, the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) recognised the serious housing problem being faced by the people of Afghanistan, in particular those refugees living in Pakistan.

HIC calls for immediate action by the concerned governments to uphold human dignity, and to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of the Afghan people, including their rights to security, adequate housing and the right to freedom of movement and residence.

The people of war-ravaged Afghanistan are still facing severe problems due to the absence of comprehensive housing and land policies and programmes, as well as a lack of basic services, including access to food, water, health, electricity and sanitation.

Despite the persisting grave situation, international attention to the country has been gradually dwindling, as have the rights of Afghanistan's people.

The plight of the people has been further exacerbated by a recent decision of the Government of Pakistan ordering all Afghan refugees in Pakistan to return to Afghanistan. The Pakistan government recently has evicted refugees living in Kurma agency and in Bajawour; thereby, forcing them to return to Afghanistan. Some Afghan refugees crossed the border to Afghanistan, while some have settled in the Afghan camps located in Subha Sarhad in Peshawar.

Reports indicate that a few Afghan children have died in this settlement due to the harsh conditions, and others have been subjected to violence by the Pakistani police.

In a recent press conference, the Afghan government spokesman, Rahim Karimi, confirmed the fact of that displacement, and has asked the Pakistani government to discuss the issue and develop solutions with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Some 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan face grave uncertainty. The original houses of many have been destroyed, while they have not been provided any alternate land and housing. Roughly one-third of the villages in Afghanistan were destroyed during the 23-year Soviet occupation, creating approximately 6 million refugees and IDPs.

The U.S.-led invasion and resulting war against the Taliban have further rendered thousands of Aghans homeless. Coupled with this is the recent and growing trend of land grabbing and forced evictions that have worsened the already acute landlessness and homelessness.

Kabul has a colossal housing shortage. About 40% of returnees, including those from Europe and America, are settling in the capital, a large part of which in ruins. Housing costs, however, are at a premium and rents are on the rise. In Wazir Akbar Khan and Shahr-e-now private housing rents have reached US\$ 7,000. Unemployment in Afghanistan is high, and even for the majority of working people, the average income is low. With the

average monthly salary for a government employee at around 1,600-1,800 afghanis (roughly US\$ 35). Meanwhile, the lowest monthly rent in Kabul now has risen to US\$ 200-400. That makes it impossible for the poor to pay for housing in Kabul, and dramatically widens the class of impoverished Afghans.

Moreover, 85% of Afghanistan's population lives in rural areas without adequate facilities, including housing, water, food, sanitation and electricity.

Recognising the critical post-conflict struggle for housing and land rights, after his 2003 mission to Afghanistan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing recommended an analysis of housing, property and land issues based on human rights law and the obligations of concerned States.

He called for protection of security of tenure, of the home and security of the person as cornerstones of policy, especially applying the principles of nondiscrimination and gender equality to address the existing housing and land rights crisis.

The Special Rapporteur identified the urgent need to elaborate relevant housing and land policy and legislation. HIC supports the Special Rapporteur's suggestion as well as other recommendations in his March 2004 report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

HIC strongly urges that not only the Government of Afghanistan protect the rights of Afghan refugees, but that also other governments, especially those in countries hosting Afghan refugees, uphold these human rights as an obligation of international cooperation.