



Personal Contribution to the Helsinki Process

## **The importance of municipalities to transform social realities**

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We face an amazing situation today regarding the status of municipal authorities in front of the globalisation process. They are governmental organizations though quite often they fail to receive appropriate consideration by other international actors or analysts. However they represent the institutional body closest to the social reality of people at a moment when more than 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas. We need a different approach toward the role of local governments to challenge the bad consequences of globalisation.

This approach has an international dimension linked to the reform of international multilateral institutions. Most of them were founded more than fifty years ago under another system and do not answer to the reality of the twenty-first century. This calls for a change of the traditional relations between these institutions and local authorities.

There is no doubt about the capacity of national states to take initiatives to transform economies and to introduce measures in order to fight poverty, promote employment and wealth distribution, as well as to improve social rights. Nevertheless, if we want to have people's participation and ownership in this process in order to strengthen it, municipal authorities are more capable to enable and motivate populations to voice their opinions. The most important political events of the twentieth century like the American protests against the Vietnam War and the fall of the Berlin Wall happened inside cities led by urban inhabitants.

As an example, if it is complex to have a process of participatory budgeting at the federal level, it is absolutely feasible to budget at the municipal as shown by several Brazilian cities since 1989. In addition, international and federal initiatives that promote gender equality are welcome but it is much easier to have women's direct involvement in the accomplishment of such an important issue at local level.

In this sense I believe that the Helsinki Process could include the following points in its final statement in order to enforce the role of cities and local authorities:

- a) To support UN Reform to confer the status of "Local Authorities" to representatives of municipal, provincial and other local governments.
- b) To defend a direct relationship between local governments and multilateral institutions, particularly the financial ones. They should offer their services without political conditionalities and third part interferences, according to the capacity of local entities to fulfil the contracts.
- c) To support the participation of cities and local authorities networks -- in particular the recently founded "United Cities and Local Governments" (UCLG) -- in relevant international dialogues aiming to transform the current neoliberal globalisation.

d) To support the principle of political and administrative decentralization as well as measures of participatory democracy to empower our populations.

e) To recognize and recommend the involvement of municipal governments as fundamental partners to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals as well as the recent initiative coordinated by Brazil, France, Spain and Chile to eradicate hunger and poverty.

f) To recognize municipal authorities as stakeholders in any discussion about public policies regarding social issues and local development.