

LOCAL POLITICAL ACTION: TOWARDS GREATER EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

From the beginning, the Nantes Forum has placed **the question of effectiveness and enforcement of Human Rights at the heart of the discussions**. The implementation of Human Rights is naturally pursued by the States which are the prime “dispensers” of rights and are responsible for their protection and enforcement. However, it also requires the participation and commitment of “*all individuals and organs of society*”, from international organisations to the NGOs on the ground.

Cities and local governments are part of these “organs of society” which notably in the field of economic, social and cultural policies, can make a difference by developing rights such as housing, health, access to employment, education, leisure and culture as well as local democracy. The realization of these rights may be progressive which facilitates their implementation on the ground.

The Rio+20 Conference has confirmed that in sustainable development, local governments are key stakeholders in international discussions, with operational approaches that States often do not have. When addressing the need to provide an urgent response to the deteriorated environmental and social situation, local governance is clearly regarded as the most appropriate to come out with practical solutions to serve the global community.

THE GLOBAL CHARTER AGENDA OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CITY

For several years, local authorities – organised in transnational networks – have got together to tackle the current challenges as 50% of the world population currently lives in urban areas. One of these networks is UCLG (*United Cities and Local Governments*)¹. Involved in the organization of the Nantes Forum since 2006, UCLG has, at a very early stage, looked into the relation between Human Rights and local political action. **The Global Charter Agenda of Human Rights in the city** was drawn up within UCLG.

The draft project of the *Charter Agenda* was written by a group of international experts before being submitted to public debate. The *Global Charter Agenda for Human Rights in the City* is designed as a reference framework and instrument for local governments to help them protect, respect and enforce Human Rights in their territories. It provides directions for inclusive public policies around the principles of full citizenship, sustainability and participatory democracy. The instrument makes it possible for all people in the regions concerned to defend their rights. The final text was officially adopted at the UCLG World Council in Florence on 11 December 2011.

As the name implies, the Charter Agenda is both:

- a Charter **with a commitment to leading principles**, in line with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It contains twelve chapters (see box)
- an Agenda **with a programme of action** to which signatory cities throughout the world commit themselves within their capabilities.

The signatory cities are invited to set up their own local action programme with deadlines and a number of indicators for the assessment of the level of success achieved in the implementation of the rights. Today, the challenge is to ensure that as many local governments as possible approve and adopt the Charter Agenda. The 2013 World Forum on Human Rights will provide a platform for the promotion of the procedure. Once the Forum is over, the development of a **worldwide network of local governments for Human Rights** will require a strict follow-up and a strong political commitment.

THE TWELVE CHAPTERS OF THE GLOBAL CHARTER AGENDA

“A city is defined as a local government of any size: regions, urban agglomerations, metropolises, municipalities and other local authorities freely governed”. Extract from the General Provisions of the Charter Agenda. This includes rural municipalities as well as peripheral towns and cities. The word “city” refers mainly to the community and participatory democracy.

1. Right to the city.
2. Right to participatory democracy.
3. Right to civil peace and safety in the city.
4. Right to equality between men and women.
5. Rights of children.
6. Right to accessible public services.
7. Freedom of conscience and religion, opinion and information.
8. Right to peaceful meeting, association and to form a trade union.
9. Cultural rights.
10. Right to housing and domicile.
11. Right to clean water and food.
12. Right to sustainable urban development.

For more information: <http://www.spidh.org/en/la-charte-agenda/index.html>

1. **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)** was created in 2004 and is currently chaired by the Mayor of Istanbul Mr. Kadir Topbas. Over 1,000 cities across 95 countries are direct members of UCLG. 112 Local Government Associations (LGA) are members of UCLG, representing almost every existing LGA in the world. Europe boasts the largest number of LGAs, which represent around 80 per 100 of the total European population.