

# Urban Habitat 3.0

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President and CEO

**U**rban Habitat staff, board members, allies, and over 2000 equity advocates from across the country gathered recently at the Equity Summit 2011 convened by PolicyLink in Detroit. There, we saw firsthand the consequences of decades of displacement and disinvestment on such a proud city. We heard from an array of advocates and analysts about the challenges facing Detroit and numerous other regions across the country. We delved into the current economic crisis and saw how people of color—the fastest growing segment of U.S. population—are taking the hardest hits.

We came away better informed and energized to take on the daunting task of moving our nation toward a more fair distribution of resources and decision-making power, and into a more equitable growth agenda. (See page 44.) We are looking forward to sharing those discussions and advancing that agenda at the Social Equity Caucus' annual State of the Region Conference in the Bay Area in April 2012.

The sad truth—as evidenced by the ongoing employment crisis and the political gridlock in Washington—is that our political and economic systems have failed us. Progressives need to redouble efforts to restructure these systems so that they do not punish the people who most need services and access to opportunity. We must build support for equitable policies that enable us all to enjoy basic human rights to clean air, good jobs, health care, education, affordable housing, and reliable transportation.

The Occupy 'moment' has opened a window for broader public engagement by base-building groups that have been working for years in the areas of housing foreclosures, job creation, and equitable economic development. Here in Oakland, we have begun to see more joint actions between Occupy and community-based organizations. It's clearer than ever that we need sustainable, equitable policies to match the movement's action energy.

Urban Habitat is building capacity and consensus to ensure that new economic development in the Bay

Area provides affordable housing; that it is built near emerging job centers and that public transit is frequent, reliable, and affordable. We also need to address the fact that people of color and low-income people do not live only in the urban core. Displacement and gentrification have driven many of them into outer-ring suburbs. They need the same level of attention, resources, and organizing support that the urban cores require.

A crucial dimension of our strategy for regional equity is Urban Habitat's Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI), which identifies, trains, places, and supports low-income people and people of color for priority boards and commissions in the Bay Area. With 25 alumni already on local commissions and our third graduating class moving into position, we have begun defining "success beyond the seat" and are working on tools to support our graduates in equitable policy alignment around the Bay Area. We need to widen recognition of the fact that the 99 percent is increasingly people of color and to cultivate a new generation of leadership that is grounded in and accountable to our communities.

Urban Habitat 3.0 is about engaging a broader spectrum of voices, deepening support for base-building community groups, and strengthening core programs on transportation, land use, housing, health, jobs, and the environment. We are one part of a social justice movement that is building a Bay Area that is equitable for all. Join us! ■