

22 March 2014

Final Constitution of the Housing Assembly

Preamble

- The Housing Assembly has emerged in response to the massive housing crisis in Cape Town and in South Africa as a whole.
- This crisis almost exclusively affects the working class who lives in informal settlements, backyard dwellings, overcrowded public rental housing and overcrowded and badly built RDP houses, Temporary Relocation Areas and other unfit or insecure housing.
- It is a crisis of unhealthy and unsafe conditions, overcrowding, inadequate protection against the weather, inadequate services, poor or no facilities and amenities, and poor and costly location on the margins of cities and towns or in rural areas.
- The housing crisis is bound up with a crisis of mass poverty and unemployment; people are forced to live in these areas because they cannot afford alternative decent housing.
- The millions of RDP houses built throughout the country since 1994 have largely failed to lift people out of unfit housing conditions into decent or adequate housing.
- Instead government policy failings have significantly added to the housing crisis.
- Recent policy shifts, based on stated financial unsustainability, signal a scaling back of even RDP housing provision in favour of cheaper, hopelessly inadequate and unacceptable alternatives such as site-and-services and upgrading.
- Bad housing conditions harm our children and oppress and crush us in many ways on a daily basis.
- The main reason for the failed housing policy is the profit-making system of neoliberal capitalism.
- It would seem that under capitalism and under the existing neoliberal capitalist government in Cape Town, provincially and nationally, there is no prospect of securing decent housing for all.
- We refuse to live like this any longer; and for the sake of our children and our future as a working class we commit ourselves to a mighty united struggle to put an end to these conditions and to realise our basic demand for decent housing for all.
- To this end we constitute the Housing Assembly.

1. Our vision: AN EQUAL SOCIETY, FREE OF OPPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION, IN WHICH ALL SHALL LIVE IN DECENT HOUSING!

2. Our aims are:

1. to build a City-wide mass organisation that unites the working class, especially those living in informal settlements, in backyards, in tiny and badly-built RDP houses and overcrowded public rented dwellings and other overcrowded, unfit or insecure housing, in a struggle for decent housing for all;
2. to especially reach out to and mobilise women, youth, students, the unemployed, the disabled, non-citizens (economic migrants and refugees) and other disadvantaged and oppressed groups living in bad housing conditions;
3. to support the struggle of middle class people for decent housing;
4. to link the struggle for decent housing to other key working class issues, such as water, electricity, health, the environment, land, education, unemployment and decent work, transport, among others;

5. to build a mass movement of all working class people living in bad housing conditions, not just in the City of Cape Town but in the Western Cape and throughout South Africa;
6. to link up with international struggles for decent housing for all;
7. to reveal the full extent of the suffering of the working class caused by bad housing conditions;
8. to fully expose the failings of the government's neoliberal housing policy;
9. to stop evictions, put an end to the criminalisation of the occupation of land and win the right to occupy vacant land for the purposes of securing access to housing;
10. to promote an understanding among affected communities that the cheap policies such as site-and-services, the upgrading of informal settlements and backyard dwellings, 're-blocking' initiatives, self-help schemes, among others, are hopelessly inadequate changes and unacceptable as alternatives to decent housing for all;
11. to develop a working class alternative to the neoliberal capitalist housing policy framework;
12. to form a fighting united front or alliances with unions, social movements and other working class organisations in the struggle for decent housing for all and around other key working class issues;
13. to defend and promote the common interests of the working class;
14. to struggle for a society free of oppression and exploitation and where social and economic equality prevails.

3. Our principles:

1. **maximum unity in action and struggle** of the working class;
2. **independent working class organisation**;
3. **grassroots membership, democracy and participation** in the Housing Assembly and the struggles of the working class;
4. **consistent, democratic, accountable and collective leadership** within the Housing Assembly;
5. **gender equality, women's leadership and struggle against sexist behaviour** in the Housing Assembly and society at large;
6. **opposition to all forms of racism and xenophobia** both within the Housing Assembly and in society at large;
7. **rejection of discrimination based on sexual orientation** both within the Housing Assembly and in society at large;
8. **international solidarity** in the struggle for decent housing for all.

4. Housing Assembly membership and structures:

4.1 Membership:

Membership is open to anyone who works in one of the area-based structures of the Housing Assembly and who is prepared to carry out a united struggle for decent housing for all and who agrees with the vision, aims and principles of the Housing Assembly.

4.2 The Housing Assembly and its membership organisations

- The Housing Assembly is open to membership by:
 - area-based branches
 - area action committees that are in the process of establishing area-based branches
 - area-based affiliate organisations.
- Each branch, area action committee or area affiliate binds itself to the Housing Assembly's Constitution and decisions related to the Housing Assembly as a City-wide organisation.

- Each branch, area action committee or area affiliate will have autonomy over decisions affecting the local area where it is constituted.

4.3 Housing Assembly Structures

1. General Meeting:

Role:

- The General Meeting is the highest decision-making body of the Housing Assembly.
- It will adopt resolutions and take other measures to fulfil the constitutional provisions and meet the aims of the Housing Assembly.

Representation: The number of delegates representing each designated area to the General Meeting will be decided by the Coordinating Committee.

Frequency: It shall meet every two years.

2. Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee shall comprise ten persons: five Office-Bearers, i.e. a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson, a Secretary, an Assistant Secretary and a Treasurer and one Coordinator from each of the Districts.

Role:

- To ensure that General Meetings, Coordinating Committee meetings and Steering committee meetings are convened;
- To ensure continuity between the General Body, the Coordinating Committee and the Steering Committee;
- To ensure correspondence is sent, received and responded to on behalf of the Housing Assembly;
- To serve as the public face of the organisation
- To ensure that the state of the Housing Assembly's finances is reported on.

Election and representation:

- Office-Bearers will be elected by a process of nomination, motivation and election by the General Meeting; District Coordinators will be elected by the district delegates at the General Meeting.
- A quorum would be at least three office-bearers and three District Coordinators.

Frequency of meetings: At least twice a month.

3. Co-ordinating Committee:

Role:

- Manage the affairs of the Housing Assembly between General Meetings.
- Take reports from the Districts and areas.
- Adopt measures, including special resolutions, to carry out the aims, Constitutional provisions, resolutions, campaigns and programme of action of the Housing Assembly.
- Admit branch, area action committee or affiliate membership to the Housing Assembly
- Decide on the number of delegates from each area to the General Meeting.
- Establish sub-committees.

Representation: Two representatives per branch or affiliate or one per area action committee.
A quorum shall consist of at least half of all branches, action committees or affiliates.

Frequency of meetings: Once a quarter, i.e. four times a year.

4. Steering Committee:

Role: Manage the affairs of the Housing Assembly between Coordinating committee meetings.

Representation: five representatives per district; district meetings will decide on representation to the Steering Committee.

Frequency of meetings: Once every six weeks.

5. District Committee:

Role: to carry out the decisions, plans and programme of action of the Housing Assembly.

Representation: to be decided on by the District Committee in keeping with the special resolution on Housing Assembly Structures and Representation.

Frequency of meetings: At least once a month.

6. Finance Committee:

Role:

- to oversee the finances of the organisation
- to help to draw up regular reports on the Housing Assembly's finances

Representation: one per district plus the Treasurer

Frequency of meetings: At least once every six weeks.

Special resolution on Transitional Structures of the Housing Assembly:

- In keeping with Aim 2.1 in the Housing assembly Constitution, we encourage maximum organisational unity on an area basis of all those living in bad housing conditions in each of the Housing Assembly Districts.
- We will be guided by the principle of one Housing Assembly branch or affiliate per area.
- After full discussion within branches, area action committees and organisations and full consultation within each district, District Committees will agree on designated areas for the district.
- Over the next two years, in each district, existing area structures or organisations will take active measures to facilitate the emergence - by merger, incorporation or reconstitution - of a single united branch or affiliate in each designated area.
- Organisations will report to the Coordinating Committee meetings on progress towards the goal of one branch or affiliate per area.
- The Coordinating Committee will review progress and if necessary take measures to speed up the process of realising the principle of one branch or affiliate per designated area.

- So while we will fight for transparency with regard to allocations and clarity about the allocation criteria, the Housing Assembly will emphasis working class unity in the common fight for decent housing for all.
- To address the root cause of the problem, we therefore need an urgent building programme of decent housing that can put the millions of unemployed to work to mix cement, lay bricks, do the plumbing carpentry and electrical installations and other aspects of building decent housing, in order to reduce the backlog rapidly.
- However, this will only become a reality if we put in place a social and economic system that serves the collective needs of the working class majority and not the greed profit of a tiny minority.

Occupations and evictions

- We reject the state's zero tolerance policy on occupations that is enforced by municipalities, the police and the courts.
- We demand the right to occupy land and erect our structures for as long as there is a backlog of decent housing for all.
- We demand the right not to be evicted or to be moved to TRAs or other places where we do not wish to live.
- We demand the closing down of all municipal anti-land invasion units.
- We claim as a victory the struggle of the Marikana occupiers in Philippi (Cape Town); this has resulted in the Constitutional Court decision that it is unlawful for anti-land 'invasion' units to knock down a structure or structures that have been build by occupiers as a home to live in, regardless of how long the structure has stood or whether there is furniture in it.
- We believe that occupations are a legitimate means for both people fleeing poverty and unemployment elsewhere in the country, as well as for evicted people, backyarders and those in overcrowded housing, to take their struggle for decent housing forward.
- We note that over many decades of forced removals and pass laws the black masses in South Africa, in defiance of apartheid, won the right to occupy land and build shacks.
- Today, those who occupied prior to 1994 are not threatened with eviction; while those who occupy today face the harsh and repressive zero tolerance policy on occupations.
- This is to make a mockery of the new democracy and to effectively criminalise our struggle for decent housing.
- We note with disgust that the state upholds the property rights of the rich, while the poor are expected to rot away for many more decades under intolerable living conditions.
- By failing to address the housing crisis, by allowing the appalling conditions that people face daily, by failing to provide decent housing for all, the state and its functionaries are the real 'criminals'.

Free quality public services

- Many of our people are still without access to even basic services, especially in the informal settlements and backyards.

- We believe houses should be built and services provided to meet the needs of the working class and not for profit.
- The current ongoing commodification of services is denying the poor a right to quality services since they cannot afford to pay.
- With rising unemployment and household expenses (especially food and transport costs), more and more people are unable to pay for water and electricity services. Those who have prepaid meters cut themselves off when they run out of money to pay for units.
- We also note with alarm that the City intends extending prepaid electricity meters to all households.
- We note that the quality of services to poor communities has deteriorated as a result of the privatization and outsourcing of municipal services.
- We demand an end to water and electricity disconnections.
- We demand an end immediate end to the installation of pre-paid water meters, including 'Water Management Devices' and pre-paid electricity meters
- We call for the scrapping of all arrears for working class households.

Decent jobs for all

- Unemployment is destroying our communities; so we open the doors of our affiliates to the unemployed and underemployed in a struggle for both decent housing and decent jobs for all.
- We demand a living income grant for the unemployed.
- We have common cause with underemployed workers, such as those on Extended Public Works Programmes, against short-term contract jobs at lower wage rates and inferior conditions of service.
- This is just another cheap labour scheme, like the Youth Wage Subsidy, that forces working class people to compete with each other in a 'race to the bottom'.
- We reject the efforts of the state and the bosses to entrench a two-tier labour market.
- We will campaign jointly with the unions against all cheap labour schemes and the two-tier labour market and for decent jobs for all.