



**"With and for the poor" planning, the
key to protect urban dwellers
from climate change**

GENEVA (5 October 2009) -- "The rapid expansion of informal settlements and the particular vulnerability of low-income groups to the effects of climate change is a major challenge," warns Raquel Rolnik, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. In her view, "the theme of this year's World Habitat Day --'Planning our Urban Future'- is an urgent call to address the challenges faced by urban dwellers, specially the most vulnerable."

"Disasters caused by extreme-weather are not simply a result of natural events, but reflect also a failure of urban planning and development policies" stresses the UN expert," noting that around one billion people worldwide live in precarious and overcrowded housing conditions, in slums or informal urban settlements, many located on sites at risk from flooding or landslides.

Low income dwellers are often located in the most hazard prone areas within cities. They lack the basic infrastructure and services necessary to protect them from environmental disasters. "Cities lacking in protective infrastructure are generally more susceptible to climate related disasters, with many having experienced the highest number of flood-related deaths and injuries in recent years," says Rolnik.

"Land and housing for the poor should be placed in the center of urban planning in order to ensure the sustainability of cities", warns the UN expert, further emphasizing the urgent need for action to reduce the vulnerability of urban dwellers to the impact of climate change. "Concerned communities need to be consulted and be allowed to participate in the decision-making process."

For the Special Rapporteur, "access to affordable and well located land needs to be guaranteed to avoid further unplanned settlement expansions or settling the poor far away from income earning or human development opportunities."

In celebrating UN Habitat Day, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing calls upon all states to reflect on how to improve urban planning so as to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected from the effects of climate change.

Raquel Rolnik (Brazil) was appointed as Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context by the United Nations Human Rights Council, in May 2008. As Special Rapporteur, she is independent from any government or organization and serves in her individual capacity. An architect and urban planner, Rolnik has extensive experience in the area of housing and urban policies.