



national policy and advocacy council on homelessness

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National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH) celebrates World Habitat Day at the 9th Annual Florida Coalition for the Homeless Conference

October 4 is World Habitat Day, and the National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH) will be celebrating the day with participants at the 9th annual statewide conference of the Florida Coalition for the Homeless. Brad Paul, Executive Director of NPACH will be speaking at the "Unlock the Door: Keys, Doorbells and Crowbars" conference in Tampa, Florida on Monday at 12:00 NOON. The conference, being held at the Doubletree Hotel Westshore, features over 50 workshops and panels covering the areas of housing, health, income, and civil rights.

Since its inception by the UN General Assembly in 1985, World Habitat Day has been celebrated annually on the first Monday in October. The theme of this year's World Habitat Day, "Cities – engines of rural development," underlies the importance of mutually beneficial linkages essential for the development of both cities and rural areas. This year, the global ceremonies will be coordinated from the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. Across the globe, a wide range of events are planned, including ribbon cutting ceremonies in Benin to dedicate new housing, press conferences in the Ivory Coast and debate broadcasts on Radio Mozambique. Elsewhere, in Fiji, workshops will be held on the critical importance of social housing and housing rights groups in India, through the National Forum for Housing Rights, are organizing a four-day campaign focused on forced evictions targeting the urban poor. The choice of Nairobi for the global celebration of the World Habitat Day this year, is to highlight the phenomenal rate and social-economic significance of urbanization in the developing world, which Kenya represents. For Nairobi, and for cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, this year's theme highlights the importance of treating urban and rural issues holistically. It also draws on lessons and best practices from the highly industrialized cities of Europe and North America where 80 per cent of the total population now live in urban areas.

While the causes of housing instability in the United States are national in origin, it manifests itself differently in rural and urban areas as a result of shifts in regional economies, labor and housing markets, and attendant local and state public policy. Taken as a whole, 14.4 million people pay over 50% of their income on housing, over 5 million renter households live in "worst case" housing situations, the poorest renters face a lack of over 2 million affordable units, and 3.5 million people experience homelessness each year, 40% of whom are children. This housing crisis takes place against the troubling backdrop of recent U.S. Census data, which revealed that 35.9 million Americans are living in poverty. Similarly, UN Habitat's *State of the World's Cities Report 2004/2005* found that in many of the world's cities, lack of affordable housing and discriminatory practices force migrants to live spatially segregated lives in ghettos where they suffer labor exploitation, social exclusion and violence.

Among the themes being explored as part of the conference's celebration of World Habitat Day are comparative anti-poverty efforts, rural and urban homelessness in the United States, and a discussion of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which includes a clearly defined right to housing under Article 11. Increasingly, US housing advocates are seeking to apply international human rights law to anti-homelessness strategies. The United States has consistently refused to recognize any human right to housing and has, in fact, implemented policies, which would be classified under the ICESCR as "retrogressive measures." These include policies such as dramatically cutting Section 8 and other housing programs for the poor and instigating forced eviction and displacements resulting in homelessness.

For more information, please visit www.npach.org. For more information on World Habitat Day, please visit: <http://www.unhabitat.org/whd/2004/>