24th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP)

"Connect, Integrate, and Humanize: Cities Facing the Challenge of Generating Community"

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CONCEPT NOTE

Session 5

Building Human Rights Cities: Democracy, Participation, and Local Action

Date: May 22, 2025

Time: 9 am - 10:30 am

Venue: UCC Auditorium, Córdoba, Argentina

Thematic Area: Community Building ⌄

BACKGROUND

In the context of increasing global challenges, the role of local governments in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy has become more crucial than ever. Democracy, as a system of governance, stands as a universal cornerstone for the protection of human rights. It not only establishes a **framework for ensuring the safeguarding of fundamental freedoms** but also creates an environment where **individuals can actively exercise their rights.** Democracy and human rights are mutually reinforcing, and in a time where democracies are at risk, so are human rights. This session will explore the **interlinks between democracy and human rights, and how civil society participation can help achieve human rights cities.**

Local governments are at the heart of implementing policies that ensure the well-being and rights of citizens. However, the impact of global trends, such as digitalization, migration, the climate crisis and economic disparities, has put significant **pressure on local governance structures and citizen trust**. The dissatisfaction with representative

institutions fosters mistrust, populism, misinformation, and hate speech, highlighting the urgent need for an in-depth democratic dialogue.

Social movements have the potential to drive meaningful change by influencing laws, policies, and cultural norms, but their ability to create impact largely depends on the level of public support they garner. Local governments, being the closest form of governance to the people, play a crucial role in **shaping the civic space** where individuals can voice their opinions and aspirations and engage in dialogue about their rights and the city they want to build. It is therefore vital to create and support existing participatory structures and mechanisms that allow citizens and communities to contribute to policy and decision-making processes. **Strengthening our efforts for human rights cities must be a collective and democratic work, and the cornerstone of rebuilding trust in democracies.**

OBJECTIVES

- Reaffirm the role of democracy in regional and local governments to achieve human rights

- Discuss how local governments can support social movements and citizen participation to build a human rights city agenda

- Explore the good practices and challenges to creating inclusive participatory mechanisms at the local level

- Ensure the inclusion of human rights in the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP) community, work and programme

METHODOLOGY

This **90-minute presentation panel** will feature an introduction to set the ground on human rights and democracy, as well as the role of UCLG's Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights. Following this, a panel of local governments will share their good practices on participatory democracy and citizen engagement for human rights. Presenters will then get a chance to discuss practices and explore solutions to advance the frameworks for human rights cities. An interactive Q&A session will follow, encouraging engagement from the audience.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How can the human rights city agenda help us rebuild trust in democracies and institutions?

- How can social movements and citizen participation help us achieve a human rights agenda?

- In what ways can local governments better support social movements and citizen participation in decision making and implementation processes?

SPEAKERS (Preliminary)

- **Angela Vidal Gandra da Silva Martins**, Secretary for International Relations of São Paulo (Brazil)
- **Enrique Galindo Ceballos**, Mayor of San Luis Potosí (Mexico)
- **Gustavo Moreno**, Director of Human Rights Policy of Morón (Argentina)
- **Gessica Vallejo**, Mayor of Candelaria (Colombia)
- **Maira Topall**, Coordinator of International Programs, Seine-Saint-Denis (France)
- **Saide Jamal**, Executive Director of CEDEPA (Mozambique)
- **Josep María Llop Torné**, Director of the UNESCO Chair – Intermediate Cities: Urbanization and Development at the University of Lleida (Spain)

- <u>Moderator:</u> **Adrià Duarte,** Coordinator of the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG