ICCCASU6 – Day 2 Newsletter, July 29, 2025

Celebrating a Decade of Global Ideas and Local Solutions

Day 2 of ICCCASU 2025 unfolded with urgency, insight, and vision. The conference brought together leading voices from across disciplines and continents, sparking meaningful dialogue on today's most pressing urban challenges—housing insecurity, environmental vulnerability, equitable development, and inclusive planning. From diplomatic roundtables to cutting-edge research panels, the day underscored the power of cross-cultural knowledge exchange and grassroots engagement. The centerpiece of the day, however, was the keynote session, which delivered unparalleled clarity and a compelling call for transformative urban action.

The morning opened with a Special Dialogue between UN-Habitat and African Ambassadors on sustainable urbanization across the continent. H.E. Bafétigué Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire) stressed the importance of diversifying Canadian investment in Africa, calling for country-specific strategies and deeper engagement with the African diaspora. H.E. Tewodros Girma Abebe (Ethiopia) outlined Ethiopia's focus on domestic financing, sustainable housing programs, and energy infrastructure, while cautioning against foreign overreach in real estate. H.E. Carolyne Kamende Daudi (Kenya) highlighted Kenya's Affordable Housing Program and its infrastructure partnerships with China, emphasizing the need for local capacity-building, sustainability, and inclusive governance. This discussion reflected a growing demand for equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships to shape Africa's urban future.

The keynote session that followed marked a pivotal moment in the conference. Grace Chikumo-Mtonga, President of the Habitat International Coalition, delivered a keynote titled *"Humanising Urban Cities in a Rapidly Changing World."* She began with a stark reality: 1.81 billion people now live in high-risk flood zones, even as urban populations continue to double. Cities, she warned, stand at a crossroads—caught between being engines of growth and epicenters of crisis. With over one billion urban poor and more than half of the world's forcibly displaced populations now residing in cities, Chikumo-Mtonga called for an urgent shift toward participatory, inclusive, and climate-resilient urban policies. Cities must be more than resilient—they must be just, inclusive, and humane. She emphasized that poor planning has led to sprawling, unsustainable development, high emissions, and limited access to essential services. In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa's infrastructure gaps and widespread informality, she called for a paradigm shift—one that includes integrated planning, innovative financing, strong political will, and public-private

collaboration. At the heart of her address was a powerful message: urban futures must be anchored in dignity, housing rights, and local agency.

Aziza Chaouni, Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Toronto and founding principal of Aziza Chaouni Projects, followed with her keynote, *"Affordable Housing in Africa: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Solutions."* Drawing on her award-winning work and research, Chaouni examined the structural roots of Africa's housing crisis. She highlighted the disconnect between rapid urban growth and inclusive development, proposing architecture as a tool for bridging equity and sustainability. Through striking built examples, she demonstrated how locally sourced materials, low-carbon technologies, and community-led design can produce affordable, durable, and climate-resilient housing. Importantly, she stressed the need to engage marginalized communities not just as beneficiaries, but as co-creators in urban design. For Chaouni, participatory architecture is not a lofty ideal—it is a necessity for social justice. She also called for interdisciplinary collaboration to rebuild urban systems from the ground up. Her keynote reframed architecture not as a luxury, but as a force for empowerment and urban resilience.

Dr. Navid Mashhadi Moghaddam, a leading GeoAI expert from the University of Ottawa, concluded the keynote session with his talk, *"AI in the City: From Black Boxes to Democratic Futures."* He presented a transparent and interpretable spatial deep learning framework designed to enhance accountability in urban decision-making. His research showcased how AI can accurately map ethnic clustering, urban movement, and settlement dynamics. Crucially, Moghaddam challenged the prevailing notion that AI must be opaque—arguing instead that democratic urban governance requires transparency. He demonstrated that interpretable AI systems not only yield better insights, but also align with principles of fairness and inclusivity. His vision of "democratized AI" offered a compelling path forward for integrating technology ethically into urban planning.

During the Lunch Talk "Cross-National Insights into Housing Issues: A Canada–China Comparison," Benjamin Gianni (Carleton University), John Zacharias (Peking University), and Randolph Wang (City of Ottawa) launched the report from last year's SSHRC-funded Canada–China Housing Workshop. They explored differences in housing systems, with Canada's market-driven model contrasted against China's rapid, state-led urbanization via land leasing. The discussion raised critical questions about balancing speed and democratic accountability in infrastructure development.

The afternoon sessions further expanded the conference's scope, offering a diverse array of thematic panels and region-specific dialogues.

In the *Special Panel on Women's Spaces*, moderated by Geneviève Drouin (Rooftops Canada) and Menna Agha (Carleton University), panelists explored feminist approaches to urban planning across Angola, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. Highlighting tools such as participatory mapping and social tenure systems, the discussion emphasized how women are transforming urban landscapes by challenging patriarchal norms and advancing equitable land rights. Given that nearly 90% of Africans live outside formal land administration systems—often on low-cost, high-risk informal settlements—women and children face heightened vulnerability. Securing legal rights to land and housing enables women to better address household needs, respond to health and

environmental crises, and access economic opportunities. Central to the conversation was the *Women's Spaces project*, a five-year initiative (2022–2027) co-funded by Global Affairs Canada and Rooftops Canada, which promotes women's empowerment through inclusive, multi-level partnerships and legal reforms in urban land tenure. The panel underscored that feminist urbanism is fundamental to creating resilient, just, and sustainable cities.

In parallel, the *Roundtable on the Lobito Corridor*, moderated by Allan Cain (Development Workshop Angola), provided critical insights into the complex relationship between infrastructure development, extractive industries, and green transitions in Southern Africa. The Lobito Economic Development Corridor—a key initiative connecting Angola, the DRC, and Zambia—seeks to boost regional trade, mobility, and integration, exemplifying functional interdependence as G7 investments build upon China-financed infrastructure. Panelists from UN-Habitat, academia, and civil society acknowledged the corridor's potential to improve livelihoods and services but also highlighted significant risks including displacement, environmental harm, and reliance on extractive economies. The discussion stressed that growth driven by infrastructure must prioritize inclusive governance, secure land tenure, and equitable benefit-sharing to protect local communities. As Africa pursues green and economic transitions, the roundtable called for planning frameworks centered on the rights and well-being of people living along these strategic development corridors.

Throughout the day, Sessions 9–17 tackled diverse urban themes: water insecurity in Ghana, decentralization in Togo, and transit-oriented development (TOD) comparisons between China and the U.S. Discussions on public space spanned cities from Beijing to Yaoundé, emphasizing its role in inclusion and cohesion. Sanitation and waste management in Lusaka, Yaoundé, and Dakar revealed the urgent need for integrated urban health strategies. Panels on smart cities, participatory planning, and innovation in Chinese industrial zones showed how both the Global North and South confront shared challenges in creating adaptive and just urban environments.

Later in the day, Dr. Moghaddam led a specialized workshop on GeoAI tools, introducing a model capable of predicting settlement patterns with 95% accuracy based on over 400 demographic variables. The tools presented help visualize the social forces driving urban migration, identify tipping points in neighborhood dynamics, and simulate urban expansion using physics-based modeling. His session revealed new possibilities for evidence-based, inclusive, and transparent urban planning.

The day concluded on a heartfelt note with reflections from Professor Benjamin Gianni, who praised the dedication of volunteers, coordinators, and presenters. A closing video montage celebrated their contributions and brought warmth to the end of an inspiring day. Finally, Professor Gianni announced the 6th ICCCASU Conference "***2025 Ottawa Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development***," co-authored by Allan Cain (Development Workshop Angola), Huhua Cao (University of Ottawa), Benjamin Gianni (Carleton University), Claude Ngomsi (UN-Habitat), and John Zacharias (Peking University). The declaration affirmed a shared commitment to building inclusive, equitable, and sustainable urban futures for all. In addition, ICCCASU issued its first Call for Action (see the text at the end of this newsletter).

2025 Ottawa Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development

1. The engagement of local populations and Indigenous communities, from the analysis of challenges to the implementation of solutions, using more endogenous resources to accelerate land security, land-use planning, and the participatory production of housing within decent living environments.
2. The involvement of national social and financial institutions in the processes and procedures of co-creation and co-financing of access to secure land tenure, socio-collective infrastructure and roads, and the co-production of affordable housing for all over the long term.
3. The synergy in the development and implementation of urban planning and construction standards and regulations among researchers, policymakers, financiers, and developers.
4. A national public mechanism for incentivizing and facilitating access to credit and guarantees for populations and investors to support the production of social and affordable housing for all.
5. The reduction of risks from natural disasters and socio-security crises relies on compliance with standards while taking advantage of new information and communication technologies.
6. Dialogue among policymakers, researchers, financiers, and developers from Africa, Canada, and China is a mechanism to be promoted to benefit from shared knowledge, technologies, and lessons in order to make cities safer, more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, leaving no country behind.

Based on the above, the partner institutions of ICCCASU commit to contributing to the improvement of the scientific and institutional environment essential to making urbanization more humane by:

1. Promoting action-oriented research on innovative models for access to secure land and the digitalization of land information systems to improve the business climate and make mortgage credit more accessible.
2. Providing or contributing, upon request, to the promotion of evidence-based scientific advice to the UN-Habitat open working group and to Member States on housing.
3. Conducting comparative research on mass real estate development, presidential housing programs, urban renewal, housing banks, and mortgage credit.
4. Designing and leading initiatives for the digitization (Internet, AI, GIS) of land, housing, and basic services administrations.
5. Carrying out research and seminars on city-to-city cooperation with China, the Canadian Initiative for Africa, and the Declaration of the African Urban Forum.

Déclaration d'Ottawa 2025 sur le développement urbain durable

1. L'engagement des populations et des communautes autochtones de l'analyse des defis a la mise en oeuvre des solutions avec plus des ressources endogenes pour accelerer la securisation et la planification des terres et la production participative des logements dans les cadres de vie decent
2. L'implication des institutions sociales et financieres nationales aux processus et procedures de co-creation et de co-financement de l'acces au foncier securise, aux infrastructures socio-collectives et voiries, et de la co-production des logements abordables pour tous a long terme
3. La synergie de l'élaboration et la mise en oeuvre des normes et regles d'urbanisme et de construction entre les chercheurs, les decideurs, les financiers et les developpeurs
4. Un dispositif public national d'incitation et de facilitation de l'acces des populations et des investisseurs aux credits et garanties pour la production de l'habitat social et abordable pour tous
5. La reduction des risques de catastrophes naturelles et des crises socio-securitaires repose sur le respect des normes en tirant profit des nouvelles technologie de l'information et la communication
6. Le dialogue entre les decideurs, les chercheurs, les financiers, et les promoteurs de l'Afrique, du Canada et de la Chine est un mecanisme a promouvoir pour tirer profit des connaissances, des technologies, et des leçons afin de rendre les villes plus sures, inclusives, resilientes et durable pour ne laissez aucun pays derriere.

De ce qui precede, les institutions partenaires d'ICCCASU s'engagent a contribuer a l'amelioration de l'environnement scientifique et institutionnel indispensable pour rendre l'urbanisation plus humaine en:

1. Promouvant la recherche-action sur les modeles innovants d'acces aux terres securises et de digitalisation du systeme d'information fonciere pour accroitre le climat des affaires afin de rendre les credits hypothecaires plus accessibles
2. Apportant ou en contribuant, selon la demande, a la promotion des conseils scientifiques bases sur les preuves au groupe de travail ouvert d'ONU-Habitat et aux Etats membres sur le logement
3. Realisant des recherches comparatives sur la promotion immobiliere de masse, les programmes presidentielles sur le logement, la renovation urbaine, les banques de l'habitat et les credits hypothecaires
4. Elaborant et pilotant des initiatives de dematerialisation (Internet, IA et SIG) des administrations foncieres, de l'habitat, et le développement des services de base
5. Conduisant des recherches et des seminaires sur la cooperation villes-villes de la Chine, l'initiative Canadienne pour l'Afrique, et la declaration du Forum Urbain de l'Afrique

ICCCASU's first Call for Action

10th Anniversary – Ottawa 2025

The International Conference on Canadian, Chinese, and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCCASU), launched in 2015 by the University of Ottawa and UN-Habitat, serves as a global platform connecting academic research with policy innovation and practical urban solutions. Co-hosted by UN-Habitat, the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and McGill University, ICCCASU convenes experts from Canada, China, and Africa—regions representing over 30% of the world's urban population. Each region contributes unique strengths in governance, development strategies, and lived urban experiences. Marking its 10th anniversary in Ottawa, ICCCASU continues to advance people-centred, inclusive, and sustainable urban futures through meaningful North–South collaboration.

2025 Theme: People-Centred Urbanization

This year's theme emphasizes the inseparable links between housing, livelihoods, and urban resilience. True sustainability requires cities to serve everyone, especially the most marginalized populations.

ICCCASU 2025 calls for a revitalized global-local movement under the banner:
"Global Ideas, Local Solutions."

We must transition from discussion to action, and from theory to collaboration. ICCCASU is evolving into a dynamic platform bringing together:

- Government and public institutions
- Academic and research communities
- Entrepreneurs, social innovators, and the private sector
- Civil society organizations, grassroots groups, and citizens

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Action-Oriented and Locally Grounded

ICCCASU aims to act as a catalyst for:

- Inclusive urban governance and participatory planning
- Cross-sector partnerships and locally owned solutions
- Empowering communities, particularly women, youth, and informal workers
- Sharing innovations across borders and contexts

Public Space, Dignity, and Urban Informality

As cities worldwide confront increasing inequality and exclusion, public space has become crucial for people to claim their rights, dignity, and means of survival.
In many Global North cities, including Ottawa, concerns over street begging reflect broader issues of poverty and belonging. In many Global South cities, informal street vending—often led by women—is a common survival strategy in the absence of formal

employment or social protection.

These realities raise a vital question: Who has the right to access, use, and shape public space?

ICCCASU aligns with the Right to the City principles outlined in UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda (2016), advocating for just and inclusive governance of public spaces. This entails:

- Recognizing informal livelihoods such as vending, performing, or begging as expressions of resilience, agency, and creativity—not nuisances
- Rejecting policies that criminalize poverty and marginalization
- Designing urban spaces that are flexible, inclusive, and open to all
- Prioritizing dignity, fairness, and social justice in the planning and management of public spaces

Public spaces must be safe, clean, accessible, and welcoming to everyone. Clear regulations are necessary to balance openness with appropriate controls, ensuring no group dominates or is excluded. Public space should be a shared resource benefiting residents, workers, visitors, and vulnerable populations alike.

While informal work sustains many livelihoods and deserves respect, rules and boundaries are essential to maintain fairness and safety for all—including children, elders, commuters, visitors, and marginalized groups.

ICCCASU calls for strong leadership, thoughtful design, and collaborative efforts to transform public spaces into vibrant, shared places where everyone can rest, meet, express themselves, and earn a living with dignity and security.

From Margins to the Urban Core: Toward Transformative Change

To build truly inclusive cities, we must:

- Shift from top-down regulation to community-based co-governance
- Recognize informal and marginalized actors not as problems, but as citizens to empower
- Reimagine public space as a site of encounter, care, and livelihood—not control
- Elevate voices historically excluded from urban decision-making, especially women, migrants, racialized, and low-income communities

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Join Us in Shaping the Next Decade of Urban Transformation

ICCCASU aspires to be a forum not only for reflection but for reimagining and rebuilding urban futures. Together, we must co-create cities that prioritize people over profit—where no one is invisible, and no one is left behind.

From Ottawa to the world, we commit to a sustainable urban future rooted in dignity, equity, and collective action. Let's make cities work for everyone—starting now.

Premier appel à l'action d'ICCCASU

10e anniversaire – Ottawa 2025

La Conférence internationale sur l'urbanisation durable au Canada, en Chine et en Afrique (ICCCASU), lancée en 2015 par l'Université d'Ottawa et ONU-Habitat, constitue une plateforme mondiale reliant la recherche académique à l'innovation politique et aux solutions urbaines concrètes. Coorganisée par ONU-Habitat, l'Université d'Ottawa, l'Université Carleton et l'Université McGill, ICCCASU réunit des experts du Canada, de la Chine et de l'Afrique — trois régions représentant plus de 30 % de la population urbaine mondiale. Chaque région apporte ses forces spécifiques en matière de gouvernance, de stratégies de développement et d'expériences urbaines vécues. À l'occasion de son 10e anniversaire à Ottawa, ICCCASU poursuit son engagement en faveur d'un avenir urbain centré sur les personnes, inclusif et durable, à travers une collaboration significative Nord–Sud.

Thème 2025 : Une urbanisation centrée sur les personnes

Le thème de cette année met en lumière les liens indissociables entre logement, moyens de subsistance et résilience urbaine. Une véritable durabilité exige que les villes répondent aux besoins de toutes et tous, en particulier des populations les plus marginalisées.

ICCCASU 2025 lance un appel à une mobilisation renouvelée, à toutes les échelles, sous la bannière :
« Idées globales, solutions locales. »

Nous devons passer du discours à l'action, et de la théorie à la collaboration. ICCCASU évolue pour devenir une plateforme dynamique rassemblant :

- Les gouvernements et institutions publiques
- Les communautés académiques et de recherche
- Les entrepreneurs, innovateurs sociaux et le secteur privé
- Les organisations de la société civile, les groupes communautaires et les citoyen·ne·s

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Une approche axée sur l'action et ancrée localement

ICCCASU se veut catalyseur de :

- Gouvernance urbaine inclusive et planification participative
- Partenariats intersectoriels et solutions portées localement
- Autonomisation des communautés, en particulier des femmes, des jeunes et des travailleurs informels
- Partage d'innovations au-delà des frontières et des contextes

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Espace public, dignité et informalité urbaine

Alors que les villes du monde entier sont confrontées à une montée des inégalités et de l'exclusion, l'espace public devient un lieu clé pour revendiquer des droits, la dignité et des moyens de survie.

Dans les villes du Nord, y compris à Ottawa, les préoccupations liées à la mendicité révèlent des enjeux plus profonds de pauvreté et d'appartenance. Dans les villes du Sud, la vente de rue informelle — souvent menée par des femmes — est une stratégie de survie face au manque d'emploi formel ou de protection sociale.

Ces réalités soulèvent une question essentielle :
Qui a le droit d'accéder à l'espace public, de l'utiliser et de le façonner ?

ICCCASU s'aligne sur les principes du **Droit à la ville** définis dans le **Nouvel Agenda urbain d'ONU-Habitat (2016)**, plaidant pour une gouvernance juste et inclusive des espaces publics. Cela implique :

- Reconnaître les moyens de subsistance informels (vente, performance, mendicité) comme expressions de résilience, d'autonomie et de créativité — et non comme des nuisances
- Rejeter les politiques criminalisant la pauvreté et la marginalisation
- Concevoir des espaces urbains souples, inclusifs et accessibles à toutes et tous
- Placer la dignité, l'équité et la justice sociale au cœur de la planification des espaces publics

Les espaces publics doivent être sûrs, propres, accessibles et accueillants. Des règles claires sont nécessaires pour garantir un équilibre entre ouverture et régulation, afin qu'aucun groupe ne soit exclu ni dominant. L'espace public doit être une ressource partagée profitant à l'ensemble de la population — résident·e·s, travailleur·euse·s, visiteur·euse·s et personnes vulnérables.

Si le travail informel soutient de nombreux moyens de subsistance et mérite respect, des règles et limites sont indispensables pour garantir l'équité et la sécurité pour tous — y compris les enfants, les aîné·e·s, les usager·ère·s des transports et les personnes marginalisées.

ICCCASU appelle à un leadership fort, une conception réfléchie et des efforts collaboratifs pour transformer les espaces publics en lieux partagés, vivants et inclusifs où chacun·e peut se reposer, se rencontrer, s'exprimer et gagner sa vie avec dignité.

Des marges au cœur de la ville : vers un changement transformateur

Pour bâtir des villes véritablement inclusives, nous devons :

- Passer de la régulation descendante à une cogouvernance communautaire
- Reconnaître les acteur·rice·s marginalisé·e·s non comme des problèmes, mais comme des citoyen·ne·s à autonomiser

- Réimaginer l’espace public comme lieu de rencontre, de soin et de subsistance — non de contrôle
- Élever les voix historiquement exclues des processus décisionnels urbains, notamment celles des femmes, des migrant·e·s, des personnes racisées et à faible revenu

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Participez à façonner la prochaine décennie de transformation urbaine

ICCCASU aspire à être un forum non seulement de réflexion, mais de co-construction d’un avenir urbain renouvelé. Ensemble, nous devons créer des villes qui placent l’humain avant le profit — où personne n’est invisible et où personne n’est laissé pour compte.

D’Ottawa au reste du monde, engageons-nous pour un avenir urbain durable fondé sur la dignité, l’équité et l’action collective. Faisons en sorte que nos villes fonctionnent pour toutes et tous — dès maintenant.