

2008 HOUSING RIGHTS AWARDS

2008 HOUSING RIGHTS PROTECTOR AWARD WINNER:

The Constitutional Assembly of Ecuador

For more than 20 years, social and political activists in Ecuador have been demanding the convocation of a Constitutional Assembly to institute constitutional reforms capable of making significant changes in the political and economic life of the country. In recent years three presidents elected by due process have been deposed and a persistent economic crisis has reduced the majority of Ecuadorian citizens to the level of poverty.

The electoral victory of President Rafael Correa in November 2006 raised the possibility of just such a convocation. On 15 April 2007 an overwhelming majority of voters approved the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly with full powers. Popular elections were then held on 30 September 2007 to select the 130 members of the Assembly.

The Constitutional Assembly met for discussions and hearings over an eight month period, before passing the text of a new Constitution on 24 July 2008 by 94 votes out of a possible 126. The work of the Assembly was divided into ten separate areas and was open to individual and collective participation; some 160,000 persons attended meetings and over 2,000 submissions were made for inclusion in the final text of the Constitution.

Social organisations such as the *Foro Urbano* and *Movimiento Mujeres por la Vida* attended the Assembly's meetings to present proposals related to the Right to the City, to Habitat, to Living Space and so on. Interestingly, rights related to housing and habitat are inscribed under a heading that the new Constitution calls "rights to good living", a direct translation of the Quechua-language term "sumak kawsay". The new Constitution is equally original in its recognition of the nature of *Pacha Mama* as a subject of rights (articles 71-74); *Pacha Mama* is a goddess venerated by the indigenous peoples of the Andes region and broadly equates with the term "Mother Earth".

The final text approved by the Assembly was put to the people of Ecuador in a referendum held on 28 September 2008. On that date the new Constitution was approved with 64% support, making Ecuador the first country in the world to explicitly recognise in its Constitution the right to the city and rights to adequate and dignified housing, a secure and healthy habitat, and water and sanitation.

COHRE recognises the important advance that Ecuador's new Constitution represents in the struggle for full implementation of housing and other human rights in Latin America.

COHRE also acknowledge the important contributions made by social organisations – many of which work in partnership with COHRE in the Americas – in developing several of the Constitution’s key components. COHRE’s 2008 Housing Rights Protector Award will be presented to Sr Fernando Cordero (President of the Constitutional Assembly) and Sra Betty Tola (President of the Assembly’s Sub-Commission on Social Participation) on behalf of the Assembly.