

GLOBAL TENANT



INTERNATIONAL UNION OF TENANTS' QUARTERLY MAGAZINE December 2002



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Why I like my job

I guess that we all have days when we wish that we had chosen another job. In my previous life I used to teach biology and chemistry, which was great – for eight years. One day I found myself opening a file, picking out one of my old overhead transparencies from last year. Next day I picked out an old working paper from some previous semester. Then I understood that it was time to go. I was getting bored, and bored teachers are the worst. I was glad to get a new job with the UN Association of Sweden. UN affairs are interesting and the issues vary a lot. I had a great time during those nine years.

But, then again I was starting to get this creeping feeling of restlessness. It was time to go.

After a few months I spotted an ad which mentioned the Swedish Union of Tenants, wanting someone to do their international work. Hmm...I had actually been a member during those years as a tenant in Stockholm. I supported the idea of affordable housing, and someone making the balance between tenants and landlords more even. I applied, and after some rounds of interviews I got the job.

Now, after more than three years with the IUT I am starting to get to know the organisation and its people. Housing is such a wide issue, and no country is the same when it comes to housing policies.

There is so much to learn. That is one of the reasons why I like it here. Another reason is the nearness to people's everyday lives and the understanding of how important a secure home is. Every time I am being asked to travel to a country or city, I always make sure that I will be able to visit the tenants themselves. I tend sometimes to forget what I read, and hear at conferences, but I never forget the conversations around the kitchen tables. The meeting with Mr Poprowa in Krakow, who fights for his and his family's right to stay in a flat that should have been renovated 40 years ago. Mrs Morgan in Birmingham who was afraid to go out because of drug addicts pestering her neighbourhood. And meetings with tenants in Kampala who could face rent increases anytime, at any amount. These and many more whose names I have forgotten but whose faces and stories will stay with me for long.

I visited Ljubljana in Slovenia in November. The organising committee had planned everything very well before my arrival. There were TV and newspaper interviews, study visits and an annual meeting to attend. To my somewhat surprise much attention was paid to housing issues in Ljubljana during those three days.

Upon my departure, Lidija, Mateja, Tanja and other friends said that my visit to Ljubljana had been of great importance to their organisation. That was when I realised that the IUT can really make a difference. Alone we can not do much, but together we can do a lot! That is a union, isn't it! I then also realised how much I enjoy my work.

Magnus Hammar
Secretary General, IUT



Calendar 2003

March 14-16: Social Housing, today and tomorrow. Organised by FAVIBC. Barcelona, Spain

March 18-20: Swedish Housing Week, Institute for Housing and Urban Research. Gävle Sweden

March 19-21: Unhealthy Housing, promoting good health. University of Warwick, England

March 26: TPAS, 2003 RSL Tenant Participation Conference. London, England

May 21: Social Housing and the Enlargement of the EU, by CECODHAS. Prague, Czech Republic

May 26-28: Make Cities Work – annual ENHR conference. Tirana, Albania

June 11-14: German Tenant's Days / General Assembly of the Deutscher Mieterbund

August 1-3: TPAS Annual Conference. Birmingham, England

September 15-18: The 64th session of the UNECE Committee on Human Settlements. Geneva Switzerland.

October 6: International Tenants' Day / World Habitat Day

For more information, please check www.iut.nu→conferences

New IUT member

IUT welcomes the Association of Tenants of the Republic of Slovenia, ATS

When meeting in Berlin on November 29-30, the IUT board unanimously agreed to accept Združenje Najemnikov Slovenije (ZNS) to become IUT's 41st national member. ATS, or ZNS, was established in 1993.

Slovenia gained its independence, from Yugoslavia, in 1991. Already then 67 % of the dwellings were owner occupied. In 2000 the figure was 88 %, leaving only 12 % as rental dwellings.

Ms Tanja Sareč, President of the Executive Committee, writes:

In the present transitional period in Eastern European countries the security of tenure is far from a firmly established notion. Once huge public housing sector was privatised and brought about the situation that most people now live in dwellings they own.

The remaining minority of tenants, however, have lost a great deal of power and support to prove how important the security of tenure is, not only today but also in forthcoming years. The Association of Tenants of the Republic of Slovenia is the only non-government organisation dealing with this issue in the country. We have been operating for a decade, endeavouring to ensure security of tenure and protect the rights and interests of the tenants.

Until recently we functioned as the Association of Sitting Tenants in Restituted Dwellings. This issue still remains one of the most urgent problems of Slovenian transition and the housing policy. It concerns the tenants who acquired the highly protected right to use the dwellings in the public sector. As a result of privatisation and restitution,



ZNS members, from left Ms Milena Šmid, Ms Tanja Šareč, President of ZNS and Ms Edita Stok, Vice President.



Autumn in Ljubljana.

and against their will, they were forced to accept the position of leaseholders in the private sector which provides only minimal and insufficient legal protection. Slovenia may well be one of the most successful candidates for the EU membership but it pays absolutely no attention to the issues of the tenants. Thus the security of tenure is a total enigma to our authorities as well as to the housing policy. Currently the Republic of Slovenia is preparing a new Housing Act which very loosely and superficially arranges leaseholds, taking us another step further away from the housing policies of the present members of the EU.

ATS now functions on behalf of all tenants as it is clear that tenants' security has been put in jeopardy. We are dismayed by the fact that, despite a highly declared protection of human rights and security of tenure at the international and European level, the European Union shows no interest in the housing problem in the EU candidate countries. Our IUT membership has given us much enthusiasm and encouragement to have a new opportunity to alert and expose the ignored problems in the transitional countries. We sincerely hope to be able to contribute to achieving the goals of this global organisation at home and abroad.

Get in touch with Ms Sareč and the ATS through e-mail: info@zdruzenje-najemnikov.si

The Indigenous people

FACTS & FIGURES

Australia, with 17.6 million inhabitants, is one of the world's most urbanised countries. About 70 per cent of the population lives in the 10 largest cities. Most of the population is concentrated along the eastern seaboard and the south-eastern corner of the continent.

Australia has six States of which Western Australia is the largest, but least densely populated. Over 80 % of the states' population of 1.8 million lives in the state capital Perth.



Aboriginal flag

Aborigines – The First Australians

The word Aborigine is derived from Latin and means "from the beginning". This is the name given to the native Australians by the Europeans. They prefer to call themselves Koori. There are today approximately 400 000 Kooris, which constitute about 2 % of the population of Australia. Though they comprise 500-600 distinct groups, Aboriginal people possess some unifying links, such as strong spiritual beliefs that tie them to the land, a tribal culture of storytelling and art, and like other indigenous people, a difficult colonial history. Only 28% of Koori families own their own home compared to 67% of all Australian families.

of Western Australia were dispossessed of their land in much the same way as the First Nations of America.

By Ms Jesse Booth, Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Network of NSW

Aboriginal people are over represented on every social indicator – their health profile is poor, their life span is short, their education and employment levels are low incarceration rates are high.

In urban areas few private landlords are willing to rent homes to Indigenous families, who are therefore dependent on public housing. Due to successive State Government decisions to provide funds for public housing only through the sale of housing authority assets, in recent years public housing has reduced to only 5 % of all housing tenures.

Public Housing and Discrimination

At the same time, much of the remaining public housing stock has fallen into a very poor state of repair and punitive management policies have led to widespread evictions. In particular, Homeswest, the public housing authority, have a practice of terminating Indigenous tenants' agreements on the grounds of overcrowding, or that they exhibit 'anti-social' behaviour. However the problems leading to these terminations are often the result of the housing authority's own allocation policy, as well as broader discriminatory practices. More than 50% of all tenants that Homeswest evicts are indigenous, whilst Indigenous people constitute only 18% of all public housing tenants.

There is no doubt that Indigenous women and children have borne the

brunt of these practices – thousands are now homeless. Statistics show that in Western Australia 1062 Indigenous families were homeless in 1996, and that 1353 Indigenous families live in overcrowded housing. In fact, 52% of all homeless households are Indigenous.

Survival through kinship

Indigenous families often survive solely on the strength of their cultural/kinship obligations. However, when an evicted family is taken in by an Auntie or Grandmother, they and their children will in turn be threatened with eviction, and so on like dominos down a family line. It is painfully apparent to community workers that the practices of the public housing authority are discriminatory. However, legal remedies are practically non-existent because legislative protections are woefully inadequate. For example, the onus is on the victim of discrimination to provide comparative data to establish their case, while only the perpetrator, the public housing authority – the Government, has access to that information and cannot be compelled by the victim to collect or provide it. Further, the process required to bring a case to formal Hearing can take up to 5 years.



Photo: Frances Mocnik/Ina Agency Press

In spite of continuing campaigns by community workers, the cumulative detrimental affects on Indigenous women and their children is horrific. They live in abject poverty, overcrowded in houses with leaking roofs and rotting floorboards, or moving from backyard sheds to under bridges, to refuges and the back of cars. Children miss school and hospital admission rates are high. Then another Government department comes along and takes the children because their mothers cannot provide for them. The past practices of removing children have changed little – no wonder our Prime Minister can't say "sorry".

The Western Australian Acting Equal Opportunity Commissioner has begun an investigation into Homeswest's provision of public housing to Indigenous people. This is a big development, with investigation finally taking place after years of complaints of discrimination made by Indigenous against Homeswest. Such complaints of unlawful dis-

crimination against the public housing provider by indigenous people have been steadily rising since 1985, and made up 37% of the 634 complaints the Commissioner received in 2002. However, on the whole these complaints were dismissed.

The Tenants' Advice Service of Western Australia has participated in the formulation of the Investigation's Terms of Reference, which will involve refining of the question of whether any policies, practices, guidelines, processes etc directly or indirectly discriminated against Aboriginal people in an unlawful way.

Human Rights abuses concerns the whole nation

However, abuse of Human Rights in Australia is shamefully widespread, and is ongoing. We are heartened by the International Community's condemna-

tion of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and mandatory sentencing laws. Australia should also be condemned for the continuing abuse of the human rights of Indigenous people. It is a sad irony that people who have cared for this land for many, many thousands of years can be subjected to such appalling states of housing, to be overcrowded, to be evicted and made homeless.

With thanks to Joanne Walsh, Tenant Advice Service of Western Australia, for assistance and information.

More information about the plight of WA's Indigenous people in their struggle for access to secure, appropriate, affordable housing can be found at the Tenant Advice Service of Western Australia's website at www.taswa.org – follow the publications links.

Tenancy Databases – a growing threat

By Penny Carr, Statewide Co-ordinator of the Tenants' Union of Queensland, www.tuq.org.au



Opening page of
Barclay's website,
www.barclay.com.au

What are Tenant Databases?

Tenant databases are private companies which hold personal information about tenants. They purport to offer risk management and debt reduction assistance to their members, who are mainly from the real estate industry. Some database companies offer membership to private lessors but usually only if they use real estate agents to manage the property.

There are essentially two ways in which members use the database lists. Firstly, when applications for tenancies are received, the prospective tenant's name will be checked to ascertain whether they are a 'bad' tenant. Secondly, if the database member believes a tenant has defaulted on their tenancy agreement,

they can enter the tenant's name on the list of 'bad' tenants.

Tenant databases are either 'tenant history' lists or 'bad' tenant lists. However, even those claiming to disclose tenant histories, because of the time consuming nature of entering general histories onto the lists, effectively operate as lists of so called 'bad' tenants.

Tenant databases have emerged within the residential rental industry over the last ten years. Their emergence is a result of regulation of credit reference organisations and restrictions placed on access to individuals' credit history. Prior to this, real estate agents were able to access credit information on prospective tenants, which they used in assessing their tenancy applications.

What are the Problems with Tenant Database Operations?

Different states and territories report varying levels of difficulties with the operation of tenant databases. Tenants in Queensland and New South Wales are by far the most adversely affected by the unfair practices of database companies.

Lack of regulation

Tenant databases have been virtually unregulated resulting in a range of problems

with their practices. In the absence of regulation, decisions to list tenants are at the sole discretion of the database member, real estate agents, and the company. There is no independent adjudication and as a result tenants have been listed for trivial reasons, vexatiously, in circumstances where the tenant may dispute the listing, or with incomplete details resulting in mistaken identity.

Veracity of listings

Many tenants dispute the facts of their listing on a tenant database. In addition, the listing practices of members of databases vary widely, due to both individual practices and the expectations of the database company. TICA, Tenancy Information Centre of Australasia, make their members sign a contract stating they will list any default of the agreement by tenants. Some members list when a notice to remedy, or the equivalent, is issued, whilst others will list at the conclusion of a tribunal hearing. Tenants may dispute the contents of a notice to remedy but without independent adjudication of the matter, little can be done if the property manager has decided to list.

Effect on residential tenancies legislation

The threat of a database listing often undermines the te-



Illustration: Stephen Crowley, NCOSS

tenancy law provisions set out in a particular jurisdiction. The following are some examples of this.

- Disputes over the refund of rental bonds¹ are common at the end of tenancies. Parties pursue these disputes in the manner set out under tenancy law. Ultimately, these disputes are decided in the relevant Tribunal. Tenants are sometimes listed on a database even when only a small part of the bond is awarded to the other party. As a result, many tenants compromise their rights under legislation because of the fear of a listing.
- At least two database companies supply a range of proforma letters to their members for distribution to tenants at various times of an alleged default. These letters tell the tenant if they do not remedy the alleged breach immediately, they will be listed on a tenant database.
- Letters threatening a listing often assert a number of things, such as the tenant will be listed on a credit reference.

Lack of information to tenants

Prospective tenants are asked to sign tenancy application forms for assessment of their suitability for a property. Usually, tenants sign the bottom of the application form which also gives their consent to the information being checked on a tenant database and to their details being listed on tenant database if they default on their agreement. Tenants sign these forms as an offer on premises they are attempting to secure as a home. Most often, prospective tenants are not aware or do not understand the implications of what they have signed. Even when they do, they have little choice but to sign the application form, because in all but the exceptional case, they will not get the tenancy otherwise.

Once a tenant knows they are listed, it can still be difficult gaining access to the information held. TICA's 'helpline' charges \$5.45 (3 Euro) per minute for access, with tenants reporting calls taking at least ten minutes.

Effect on tenants

Nationally, just less than one third of households are housed in the private rental market. The Commonwealth government is spending less money on the direct provision of housing and more on housing subsidies in the private rental market. More people are renting, households are renting for longer periods of time, and home ownership is in decline. Whilst there is a general expansion of the private rental market to accommodate the volume of households, much stock is being lost at the low cost end of the market. When a tenant is listed on a tenant database they are virtually locked out of the private rental market. It is because of the severe impact that there should be greater limitations on what a tenant can be listed for and how long a listing should remain.

Intention to changes?

A number of changes have or are occurring in regard to the operation of databases. Currently Queensland is the only state to have announced an intention to address the pro-

blems associated with tenant databases through legislative change. What changes will occur are currently the subject of consultation.

IUT comment:

These commercial databases seem to be operating mainly in the USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand. "Over 200,000 Australians are listed on 'bad tenant databases', and most of them don't even know about it" says Norman Swan on Radio National/ABC.

¹ A Rental Bond is a deposit which you pay at the start of a tenancy. It is held as security in case you damage the flat or house, or leave with rent still owing. You cannot claim back the bond until the end of the tenancy.

December 10,
Human Rights Day

COHRE announces the winners of Housing Rights Protector Awards

Brazil, East Timor and South Africa have proven that housing rights can be made a reality despite severe economic and political difficulties. The Gov. of Brazil is recognised for its adoption of the "Statute of the City", one of the most progressive and commendable housing rights laws in the world.

and the Housing Rights Violators Awards goes to...

**Burma, Colombia, Croatia, India, Israel,
Nigeria, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and USA !**

Housing is a human right under international law. But the United States, which is not a party to the UN Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, does not recognise this. Each year 2,3 million adults and children experience homelessness in the US.

**COHRE, Centre on Housing Rights and
Evictions, Geneva Switzerland.
www.cohre.org**

Renting accommodation increases as home ownership is beyond the means of many New Zealanders

By Mr Kevin Reilly, Coordinator at the Manawatu Tenants Union

Housing was so important to New Zealand that for most of the last century it was a significant part of public policy. Access to home ownership, the provision of low cost rental housing on a large scale, enabled all New Zealanders to participate in the housing market. In the 1990s the National Government introduced housing reforms that changed the direction of public housing policy, from the mixed delivery of housing assistance through subsidised public housing and income support, to a policy of providing income support alone, by way of the Accommodation Supplement. The withdrawal of first home ownership assistance programmes has also affected New Zealand housing patterns. The nature of occupancy, the pattern of housing tenure and the cost of housing have all had a serious impact on the quality of life of New Zealand families. Members of the National Government have acknowledged that the housing reforms failed to deliver decent, affordable housing accommodation. These reforms were the catalyst for increased poverty levels that still exist today. To their credit the present Labour Government reintroduced income related rents for state house tenants, but overall rents in the private sector still remain high in most areas.

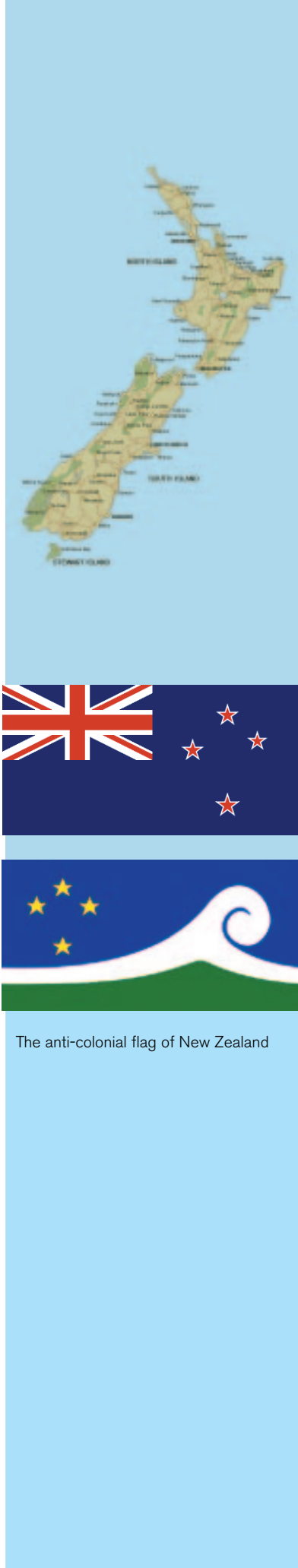
Local governments struggle for an inclusive community

The private sector still continues to be the largest provider of rental accommodation in New Zealand, forming 75% of the market, while state housing/council housing provides the remainder. In the past eight years there has been a 50 % increase in private sector tenancies as more people are renting. The average length of tenure is around 8 months. Renting accommodation is on the increase as home ownership is beyond the means of many New Zealanders. Short-term employment contracts and student loan debt has contributed to this situation. The arrival of many migrants and international students has put pressure on the housing market in urban areas and this has seen rents and house prices skyrocket in some areas. This is of grave concern to local governments as they struggle for an inclusive community. Many of the tenants being forced out are low income Pacific Island and Maori families who resent this incursion into their neighbourhoods. As you can see housing is still a major concern in New Zealand.

Who we are

The Manawatu Tenants Union is a community based agency in Palmerston North, Manawatu on the North Island. The Manawatu Tenants Union aim is to protect, promote and generally advance the rights, interests and welfare of tenants. To advise, assist and generally support tenants in their dealings with landlords from both private and public sectors. We make submissions to both central and local government on issues concerning tenants and we educate the public about laws regarding tenants. We run education seminars, in schools, prisons etc, to educate the public about laws regards tenants.

Contact Kevin Reilly at e-mail: kndreilly@xtra.co.nz



The anti-colonial flag of New Zealand

European Housing Statistics – in a mess!

No accordance of the housing terminology in Europe

What is considered a room in Europe? 5m², 10m² or 15m²? Does a room need a window? How about the housing stock? France includes 2nd homes / summer houses.

And where is the real definition of social housing? What is a tenant? European statistics includes also so called tenant owned co-operative flats in Sweden, flats that can be sold with a profit. The data and terminology used today are simply just not comparable. Yet, the governments and their ministries frequently use these figures. The same goes for experts, researchers and other policy makers such as the media.

Is collected data relevant for today's users?

Housing statistics was on the agenda when the Ministers of Housing of the EU met in Genval, Belgium, on June 28. All present ministers agreed that housing statistics are unreliable, too old and that some collected data was not really needed, such as "number of clay bricks produced". On the contrary, why is there no available statistics on "energy consumption"? This cost often makes up to 50 percent, or more, of the actual housing costs in central and east Europe.

The same issue was on the UN-ECE Agenda for the annual meeting with the Habitat Committee in September.

Who collects the data?

Today data is collected, processed and published by a number of institutions in Europe. The civil servants at the ministries of the EU states receive long and detailed forms to fill in, from different senders. These are UN/ECE, Dutch Ministry of Housing, European Mortgage Federation, OECD and RICS – Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Perhaps there are more.

Unfortunately, EUROSTAT is not involved in any compilation, as housing is not formally on the EU agenda.



Martti Lujanen

While meeting in June in Belgium, the Housing Ministers handed over this complex task to Mr Martti Lujanen of Finland – to simply sort things out! Mr Lujanen is Director General of the Housing and Building Department at the Ministry of the Environment in Helsinki.

Mr Lujanen formed an "open-ended ad-hoc" (!) group of experts from 5 countries.



The Tenants' Charter is promoted in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Our IUT member in Sarajevo, Udruženje stanara, BIHUSS, has produced a booklet which includes the Tenants' Charter, in English and in Bosnian. The booklet also includes a description of the housing situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which anyone can understand, is still very complicated and insufficient. First the war when people were forced to flee from invading troops, leaving their homes behind. Empty houses were filled with new residents who had also been forced to leave other parts of former Yugoslavia. After the Dayton Peace Treaty was signed in 1995 another wave of people filled the roads, in search for their homes. When returning they sometimes found their house or flat occupied by another family or in the state of a ruin. Rapid privatisation started in 1998, when certificates as means of payment were put into circulation.

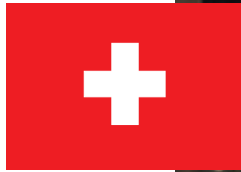
Read more about the situation on:

www.iut.nu → members → Bosnia-Herzegovina

or contact

**Mr Mehmedalija Huremović,
President of BIHUSS, at:
slist@bih.net.ba**

Switzerland



the country of watchmakers and tenants

By Magnus Hammar

Why is it that most Swiss people live in rented accommodations? About 70 % of the dwellings in Switzerland are rental accommodations, and 85 % in Geneva. Do the Swiss have an extraordinary liking for rental flats? Or, what are the reasons for these high figures?

In September, while attending the UN ECE annual meeting with the Habitat Committee, the IUT Secretariat met with Ms Karin Grobet Thorens. Ms Grobet Thorens is a lawyer with the Swiss Tenant Association in Geneva, ASLOCA - Association Suisse de Locataires.

ASLOCA/Geneva was founded in the mid 1950's, but already in 1933 there were laws that regulated the rental market and to some extent protected the tenants. ASLOCA's influence grew when Karins' father, Mr Christian Grobet, engaged himself for the cause of tenants. In 1965 Christian became the youngest MP ever. Christian has now turned 61 and he is still very much politically active.

One court – two judges

After clashes with the police in 1936, when demonstrators were shot dead, the new socialistic government in the canton of Geneva established a Reconciliation Tribunal, for tenants and landlords. This Tribunal was made compulsory in 1977, for all judicial cases that involved tenancy rights. The Tribunal has two judges, one representing the landlords and one representing the tenants. Contrary to other similar authorities, this Tribunal is free of charge. 1990 marked a year of success when this Tribunal was also introduced in the federal laws of Switzerland.

Self-determination is the hallmark of the 23 cantons

ASLOCA/Geneva has 30 000 members who are being serviced by 18 full time employed lawyers, each with an assistant. There are two offices in Geneva, one on each side of the River Rhône. The membership fee is 33 Euro/US\$ for households, and twice the amount for shopkeepers and other renters of commercial premises. Only the offices in Gen-



Karin Grobet Thorens

eva and in Zürich are open daily from 9 am to 5 pm. Also, the lawyers take turn in keeping the two offices open for free consultations to members, every evening for one hour and usually about 20-30 people show up. Most questions are solved right away, but a few may lead to legal processes which involves the Tribunal.

If the tenant needs to proceed with a court case, this is not free – but involves comparatively low costs. For a “normal” case ASLOCA charges about 135 ₣ /US\$ per hour, which adds up to 675 ₣ / US\$ for a five-hour-case. A lawyers office some where else in Geneva would perhaps charge five times more!

Lawyers may take on own cases

ASLOCA is non-profit. Incomes pay for salaries, office costs and for the juridical processes. ASLOCA can employ 18 lawyers by giving them the opportunity to take on their own cases, but only when they are done with ASLOCA's own cases. This way they can earn extra income. And for many lawyers this is an attractive alternative. Office space is expensive in the central of Geneva. The office functions somewhat like a co-operative. Every week the cases are divided equally among the lawyers. If perhaps one lawyer needs to stay at home with a sick child, the others take over his or her cases. Other benefits are longer holidays and longer maternal and paternal leaves. So altogether, this makes ASLOCA an attractive work place.

Lack of all kinds of housing in Geneva

Only 0.4 % of the housing in Geneva, all categories, are at the moment available on the market, and the housing market has come to an absolute standstill. In the 1960's, 70's and up to the mid 1980's the constructors considered that

the interest allowances and favourable loans were attractive enough for them to build rent regulated flats. The landlords signed, like in the USA, 20-year agreements with the city, which kept the flats in the category of rent regulation, or social housing. After the 20 years the landlord is free to set any rent, which often means rent rises of between 50 % and 100 %. But, the law in Geneva is clear on one thing - there is almost no way a landlord can convert rental flats into condominiums.

As the 20-year contracts are running out quickly there is today only 11 % rent regulated housing, also referred to as social housing, in Geneva.

Previously, when constructing a new multifamily house there was an agreement between the landlords, constructors and the municipality of Geneva that 2/3's of the dwellings should be in the category of rent regulated housing. But, as the market has changed so has the willingness to build for lower income households. Today only expensive and luxurious condominiums are being built.

A very strong environmental protection together with limited available land also make new construction almost impossible. All land in the canton is divided into different zones. In each of these zones only between 20 % and 40 % of the free land can be built upon.

Rising costs

The regulated rents are set by the Office National de Logement, the municipal housing authority. For being eligible to rent one of these flats there are rules and regulations. The household income can not exceed a certain amount. Also, the household can not consist of less than three persons in a two-bedroom flat of about 80m² (860 ft²). Every year both the landlord and the tenant are required to answer very detailed questions from the authority. If a tenant would dare to cheat he or she can be sentenced in court to pay a high retroactive rent, or face the possibility of being evicted. If the landlord declares false information he will be fined and lose his municipal allowances. The rent on the free market, without heating and services for 80m², is about 1300 €/US\$, and about half for the rent regulated flat. Price for a similar condominium would land somewhere at 550 000 €/US\$!

Housing allowances are available for both categories, attached to income and floor area limits.

Rental housing is flexible housing

After I have been talking to Karin for about two hours I start getting an idea of the housing situation in this rather small city. The City of Geneva today claims only around 180.000 residents. There are strict and rather well functioning laws that regulate the huge ren-

tal market, for both tenants and landlords. There is a decreasing stock of rent regulated flats and if nothing is being done they will slowly disappear. Karin says that some laws need to be changed and more pressure should be put on the landowners to make them sell land – even expropriation, if shown necessary.

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be anything particularly in the Swiss soul that favours rental housing. But, in this city of UN agencies and international corporations a flexible housing market is needed and everyone seems to think that rental housing is a good thing. However, the flexibility is now only limited to those few who can afford it.

More information from ASLOCA: asloca@aslocageneve.ch, www.asloca.ch



10 000 signatures are needed for a referendum. This one on new opening hours for shops in Geneva.

JAPAN



Government Sells off Social Housing

In 2001 the Japanese government decided, by April 2006, to privatise UDC, former HUDC - Housing and Urban Development Corporation. HUDC used to construct, with subsidies from the national government, flats that were let to tenants who had trouble finding affordable housing. Today, about 750 000 households still live in UDC administered housing. The residents strongly oppose to the privatisation through rallies and collection of signatures.

Source: Japanese Private Tenant Assoc.,
e-mail: ttn78es27i@mx8.ttcn.ne.jp

POLAND



100 % Rent Increases in Poland

On October 2nd, urged by the landlords lobby and the Polish Ombudsman, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal issued a verdict that tells "the 2001 housing Act's Restriction on possible Rent Increase"

is against the Constitution of Poland and thus cancelled it. In private stock this means immediate rent increase by 100-120%, which in a lot of cases exceed the tenant's total income!

Source: Polish Association of Tenants,
<http://3w3.net/pzl>

Read more about the threats in Poland on www.iut.nu

USA New York City



Mayor Calls for Thousands of New Homes

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced, on December 10, a \$3 billion plan to create tens of thousands of housing units in New York City over the next five years, reversing a decade-long policy at City Hall to retreat from public investment in housing. The proposal calls for repairing and preserving 38,000 units of existing housing and building 27,000 units around the city.

Source: The New York Times

ESTONIA



Rent Disputes to Be Legalised in Estonia

The first Act, which may help Estonian tenants in the case of rent disputes is waiting for its adoption by the Riigikogu, the Estonian Parliament. The future Act is presently called the Rent Dispute Resolution Bill and it provides that local governments have the right, but not the duty, to establish Rent Dispute Resolution Committees. As the representative of the tenants in the Riigikogu, I foresee a danger in the present wording of the Bill. Local governments may just create additional posts for their officials. Moreover, local governments as the largest owners of flats, may have a stronger position than tenants in those disputes, and this may help them to reach solutions favourable to them.

Source: Mr Tõnu Kauba MP, Estonian Tenants Union (Eesti Üürnike Ühingute Liit)



Berlin, November 2002
Photo: Jürgen Schoo

All the best for 2003!

Greetings from the IUT Board and Secretariat

From left top: Mr Knut O. Eldhuset (Norway), Mr Niels Busk (Denmark), Mr Heinz Barta (Austria, IUT Vice President), Mr Manfred Jonas (Germany), Mr Milan Taraba (Czech Rep.), Mr Richard Hewgill (England), Mr Jacquy Tiset (France), Ms Evelynne Brun (France), Mr Magnus Hammar (IUT Secretariat), Ms Anna Pachtová (Czech Rep.), Ms Torborg Wärn (Sweden), Ms Annika Ekström (IUT Secretariat), Ms Taraba (Czech Rep.), Mr Franz-Georg Rips (Germany).

Sitting: Ms Elisabet Lönngren (Sweden, IUT President), Ms Anke Fuchs (Germany, DMB President), Mr Jakob Trümpy (Switzerland), Ms Barbara Litke (Germany)

Not present: Ms Anne Viita (Finland), Ms Mária van Veen (the Netherlands) and Mr Michael Kane (USA).