

Tulsa Acting CRO, Mary Kell, AIA is in Quito, Ecuador this week as part of the AIA's delegation to the UN [Habitat III](#) Conference; a global gathering on housing and sustainable urban development. Below are some of her thoughts on the experience.

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It's our fourth and final day of Habitat III, the United Nations conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development that happens once every 20 years. I'm still pinching myself that I am actually here, on the other side of the equator for the purposes of connecting and collaborating with people from literally all over the world, gathering information, and sharing information about Tulsa and our successes towards solving homelessness.

I find myself inspired and encouraged by all the great people and programs that I feel I have only just begun to hear about. One of the key messages that keeps coming up is that we all agree that collaborating with each other improves all of us and the programs we are in the process of creating or have already created. There is a sense of urgency and excitement in every person I meet. Everyone has a unique story and specific reason to attend this conference, and it is fascinating to hear these stories first-hand. We are all in this together, and as it turns out we are individually smart and collectively brilliant.

The world is growing at an exponential rate and it is up to this group of leaders and millions more at home to help deliver the message that we really only have a set amount of resources that will be available for future generations, and proactive planning and focused "doing" is a priority now. The time is up to ignore the reality; we risk repeated failure at the city level in relation to quality of life, social inequities, economic viability, and health issues among the many others.

My experience here has been hands on, in that I've had the opportunity to workshop with college students about practical ways to revitalize Quito's historic city center, and learn about preliminary resilience strategy Discovery Areas with 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) Quito CRO (Chief Resilience Officer) David Ja'come Polit. David is also an architect and our respective cities, Quito and Tulsa are two of the 100 cities in the 100RC network as pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation. I have also had the privilege of being a part of an all-female panel of three AIA architects, each of us with a vision to connect and provide solutions with and for people who greatly benefit from an architect's help, produce results, and to serve the greater population.

In every formal program I attended and in all the serendipitous spontaneous discussions I had while standing in LONG lines with the rest of the 45,000+ conference attendees, charging my phone, sharing a meal, taking a taxi and in countless interactions with all of the wonderful conference volunteers and police, I have to say my life has been greatly enriched. We have our differences at the surface and in the detailed processes and terminology, but so many similarities exist that makes it possible and even likely that we can and will learn from each other once the excitement of the conference has passed. This group is working diligently to solve the impossibly big issues posed by the [New Urban Agenda](#) which will require coordinated collaboration on a world level.