**IACHR Joins UN Rapporteur in Recognizing Canadian Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing**

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Washington D.C. - The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (SRESCER) congratulate the Government of Canada on its recent announcement of a national housing strategy “to progressively implement the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing.”

Alongside the Inter-American Commission, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Leilani Farha, reiterated her view that, the recognition of the right to housing is long overdue in Canada, which has lagged behind many other members of the Organization of American States in this regard. “Recognizing, for the first time, the human rights of those who are homeless and inadequately housed is a significant moment in Canada’s evolution as a participatory democracy based on recognition of the dignity and equal rights of all.”

The Canadian housing strategy foresees creating safe and affordable housing during the next 10 years, in particular, for the Canadian population most in need, such as women and children fleeing family violence, seniors, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, those dealing with mental health and addiction issues, veterans and young adults. According to the plan, the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation and non-discrimination must guide the actions carried out by the competent authorities of the different levels of the government. It also envisages partnerships with social and private sectors to accomplish its goals.

The President of the IACHR, Commissioner Francisco Eguiguren, said: “The statement by the Prime Minister that housing rights are human rights is an important message not only for Canada but throughout the Americas due to the strengthening of the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights. The Commission highly values Canada’s endeavors in this regard.”

Widespread homelessness and inadequate housing in as affluent a country as Canada, with so harsh a climate, has shocked both United Nations human rights bodies and the IACHR in recent years. As a member of the Organization of American States, Canada is bound by the American Declaration of Human Rights, according to which everyone is entitled to the right to life and security as well as to the preservation of health through social measures related to housing.  Canada is also bound by several UN instruments that ensure and protect the right to housing.

The IACHR Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights, Soledad García Muñoz, noted: “Canada’s failure to give effect to these obligations has had tragic results including widespread homelessness, with serious health consequences and loss of life.”  She highlighted the importance to guarantee the gender perspective in the strategy, recalling the IACHR’s report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in British Columbia, which established the severe impact of homelessness on indigenous women and recommended measures to guarantee adequate housing. The IACHR Rapporteur for Canada of the IACHR, Commissioner James Cavallaro, observed: “The lack of affordable housing constitutes a serious human rights challenge that affects marginalized and vulnerable groups across Canada, and which requires a comprehensive human rights-based strategy.”

An effective rights-based housing strategy requires clear reference to the right to housing, which places on governments both immediate obligations and obligations to meet specific goals and timelines to fulfil the right for everyone within a reasonable period of time. It also requires independent monitoring and reporting to ensure that these progressive obligations are being met, a complaints procedure for systemic violations of the right to housing and full participation by those whose rights are at stake.

The announced strategy includes two new mechanisms which, if properly mandated, will help to ensure that the strategy is rights-based - a Federal Housing Advocate to consider and make recommendations on systemic barriers to accessing housing and a National Housing Council with diverse representation from those with lived experience of housing need in order to provide inputs on research, policies and programming. These mechanisms should interpret the right to housing widely, including access to public services such as drinking water, sanitation, energy supply and health and education facilities among others. In addition, the mechanisms should provide to those homeless and inadequately housed a place to be effectively heard during all the stages of the National Housing Strategy. In particular, they should seek, in the framework of their competences, to prevent violations to the right to housing and facilitate effective and comprehensive remedies to the victims.

James Cavallaro, Leilani Farha and Soledad García Muñoz jointly expressed concern regarding the homelessness targets outlined in the announcement. “We do not agree that the best an affluent country such as Canada can do is to reduce chronic homelessness only by 50% by 2028. All countries should be setting timelines to eliminate homelessness at least by 2030 in accordance with their commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We also encourage Canada to ensure that its budgetary allocations comply with human rights standards when formalized in legislation.”

In this regard, the SRESCER considers that while some of the components of the Strategy may not meet all expectations, once a rights-based approach is adopted in legislation, there will presumably be means to ensure that programs and budgetary allocations are adequate.  The fact that Canada will have national legislation affirming the right to housing and available mechanisms through which the authorities can be held accountable is an historic step forward for Canada. However, more still needs to be done to make this strategy truly effective and consistent with human rights, including ensuring that provinces, territories and local governments are on board and developing a clear understanding by all levels of government of the meaning and application of the right to housing in the context of the strategy. The State has also to keep in mind its duty to protect people from human rights violations that might arise in the framework of partnerships with private actors when implementing the National Housing Strategy.

The IACHR and the two Special Rapporteurs expressed the hope that Canada’s announced commitment to the right to housing will provide the basis for a constructive dialogue between Canada and the different international human rights mechanisms in the coming years.   “We are committed to working with Canada to ensure that the strategy is a success and that a longstanding human rights crisis that has provoked international concern will be remedied.” They added.