



Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context

**High Level Political Forum 2018 – Thematic Review of SDGs implementation
SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

Oral statement by:

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Good afternoon distinguished delegates and participants,

It is a distinct pleasure to be here to talk about Sustainable Development Goal 11.

I am Leilani Farha, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing - I was appointed in 2014 and have been immersed for the last four years in understanding global housing conditions and working on global solutions.

I am not sure of your experience but I find the SDGs – the implementation of all 17 of them - overwhelming. This made me want to go back to some basic principles and to utilize my time today to make just two points.

First, housing is the most significant issue facing cities today and will continue to be so for some time. This makes Target 11.1 – which commits States to ensuring access to adequate, affordable securing housing for all and slum upgrading – a centrepiece of the SDGs as a whole.

Second, Goal 11 and Target 11.1 will not be met unless each State develops and implements human rights based housing strategies.

Half of humanity – 3.5 billion people – lives in cities today. By 2030, almost 60 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas.

As it stands, globally, housing conditions are fraught.

It is estimated that 1.6 billion people are inadequately housed worldwide and that close to 900 million people are living in informal settlements and encampments in both the global North and South.

Beyond statistics, let me relay experiences.

I have seen people living in countries North and South in complete darkness, without electricity and without water. I have seen children playing on garbage heaps in informal settlements like they are trampolines and I have seen persons with disabilities languishing, prisoners in their own homes.

There are few cities I visit where I don't see people having to live on the streets, forced to eat, sleep, cook and defecate on sidewalks. They cling to dignity and life – but it is a thin thread.

I have seen communities evicted from their homes often by brutal force to make way for a new shopping mall or so that luxury flats can be built.

And I know of private equity firms using unprecedented wealth and power gobbling up entire neighbourhoods, only to use housing as a vehicle to grow profits for a few who have no intention of living there, while displacing the many who do.

What is perhaps most worrying of all is that these assaults on dignity and life are accepted as fixed features of a new global economic order.

If we do not find housing solutions, no State will be able to meet their other Agenda 2030 commitments. Without access to adequate, secure and affordable housing there is no equality, no health and well-being, no access to education or employment and there is no end to poverty.

Housing is at the centre of the SDGs: it's what sustains us and it's what makes us resilient.

My recommendation is that if States are going to meet their commitments under Goal 11, Target 11.1, tinkering with existing programs won't work. A fundamental shift is required – a shift whereby housing is recognized and implemented by States as a human right, not a mere matter of policy, nor a commodity, and certainly not something to be left to the whims of unregulated markets and private developers.

Homelessness, and inadequate housing are an assault on dignity and life and as such go to the heart of what triggers human rights concern. Human rights violations of this nature demand human rights responses.

A rights-based approach to housing clarifies who is accountable to whom: all levels of government are accountable to people, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups, who are recognized as rights holders, not the beneficiaries of charity.

And human rights incorporate universal norms providing a common purpose and shared set of values to laws and policies.

I recently presented a report to the Human Rights Council which articulates for States the 10 core principles that should inform a human rights based strategy. Let me elaborate on a few.

Strategies must prioritize those most in need and must make an absolute priority of eliminating homelessness. The 2030 Agenda itself requires States to end homelessness – what else could ensuring access to adequate, affordable, secure housing for all mean?

Strategies must put in place institutional mechanisms to monitor progress and hold governments accountable to goals and timelines. They must also ensure access to justice, including access to hearings and remedies in courts or elsewhere.

Strategies must be based in law and affirm the right to housing as a legal right, and they must clarify the obligations of private actors. If States intend to rely on the private sector for housing (and most will), then States must understand that the obligation to realize the right to housing still remains with them and cannot be delegated. Housing strategies will have to include robust measures to regulate and reorient financial, housing and real estate markets to ensure inclusive cities and affordable housing.

I think meeting these requirements of Goal 11, Target 11.1 will not be easy. But there is no choice. Because anything else creates cities that surely none of us want to live in.