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Canada: New rights-focused housing policy shows the way for other countries, says UN expert

GENEVA (24 June 2019) – A UN expert says the Canadian Government has set a global example with a new housing policy that embraces human rights as the most effective framework to address homelessness and inadequate housing.

"With just over a decade before the Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved, the Government of Canada has shifted its approach to the right to housing to one that recognises housing as a fundamental human right essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person," said the UN Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha.

"Canada's new model contains the hallmarks of a human rights approach. Not only does it include a legislated right to housing, it also establishes in law creative mechanisms to monitor and hold the Government accountable and ensure access to remedies to address systemic barriers to the enjoyment of adequate housing. This model can serve as an example for countries all over the world."

Farha said that despite Canada's global standing as a top 10 performing economy, there are at least 235,000 homeless people, and 1.34 million households in core housing need, with acute affordability problems in several cities.

Canada will soon appoint an independent Federal Housing Advocate who will monitor government performance, receive submissions on systemic barriers to adequate housing – including with respect to budgetary expenditures – and seek hearings before an independent panel to review systemic housing issues over which Parliament has jurisdiction. Findings and recommendations will be provided to the Minister who must table a response in Parliament.

"This impressive result was achieved because the Government took seriously its obligation to work collaboratively with rights holders, civil society, and the UN human rights system. If the Government of Canada – with its historical antipathy toward recognising the right to housing – can take this bold step and introduce a human rights compliant national housing strategy, so too can many other countries.

With this groundwork laid, Canada now has much work to do to bring meaning to this new legislation. It must move quickly to establish the appropriate accountability mechanisms, without which the right to housing will not be realised."

"There are currently 1.8 billion people worldwide living in homelessness and grossly inadequate housing. This constitutes a crisis of significant proportions. In my last year as Rapporteur, I urge all States to pursue the right to housing vigorously through the adoption of rights-based housing strategies – it is the only way that the global housing crisis will be effectively addressed by 2030."

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Ms Leilani Farha is the [UN 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. She took up her mandate in June 2014. Farha is the Executive Director of the NGO Canada without Poverty, based in Ottawa. A lawyer by training, for the past 20 years Ms. Farha has worked both internationally and domestically on the implementation of the right to adequate housing for the most marginalized groups and on the situation of people living in poverty. Her most recent [report to the Human Rights Council](#) focusses on access to justice for the right to housing.

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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