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## France's housing and homelessness crisis eclipses its commitment to human rights

French

GENEVA / PARIS (12 April 2019) - France, known as a birthplace of human rights, must improve its approach to housing and end a host of contradictions in the implementation of the right to housing and the rights to be free from homelessness and forced evictions, says a UN human rights expert.

"I am impressed that France has included in domestic law the right to housing which includes procedures for vulnerable groups to claim that right. It is a beacon in Europe. Unfortunately, it isn't working as effectively as it should," said Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, presenting a [statement](#) at the end of a 10-day visit to the country.

"While Judges can order the provision of a home within six months, in most big cities many of these orders cannot be implemented because of a shortage of available social housing stock. In the Greater Paris region, only 50% of those identified as priority households urgently requiring adequate housing have been provided with a social housing unit.

"With France being the sixth largest economy in the world, it is unacceptable that homelessness has reached crisis proportions and that many people are dying on the street," the UN expert said.

"Those living in homelessness have an average life expectancy of 48 years, just over half the life expectancy of those who are housed. The Government has reported a commitment to reversing this situation, indicating that last year it found permanent housing solutions for 70,000 people. But Housing Associations estimate that there are currently 200,000 homeless people across the country."

Farha said a 24-hour national emergency telephone number set up by the central Government to refer homeless callers to emergency beds, was flooded with calls.

"Unfortunately, more often than not, people calling cannot get through or are turned away because of a lack of space in emergency shelters. Of those who are referred to shelters, 80% will only be allowed to stay for one night, after which time, they must start the cycle all over again," the Rapporteur said.

"Hotel rooms are currently being used to house homeless families. Meant as emergency shelters, families find themselves living in these rooms for months if not years, without the prospect of accessing permanent housing. These hotel rooms often lack private bathrooms, kitchens, laundry facilities and play areas for children, and often suffer high levels of humidity, mould and bug infestations – all of which are completely incompatible with human rights standards."

Farha also said she was "deeply concerned" about the harsh living conditions in informal settlements, encampments, and squats.

"In Toulouse I visited an empty office building now inhabited by almost 300 migrants, including many children. The building is severely overcrowded with no kitchen facilities, and the sanitation system is overwhelmed. There were insects everywhere."

"In the North of France, I spoke to migrants and refugees hoping to cross the English Channel to reach the United Kingdom. After the 2016 clearance of the informal settlement in Calais, the Government has implemented a policy of deterrence, providing only the most minimum basic rights needed for survival for those living in encampments – water, food and toilets. The right to adequate housing and to be free from eviction is, however, not respected."

"Those sleeping in tents are regularly subjected to forced eviction by police, their property confiscated or cleared away. Forced evictions constitute a gross violation of the right to housing under international human rights law," the expert said.

While France is facing a number of serious housing-related human rights concerns, I am convinced that the Government can and is willing to better safeguard the right to housing for those lacking a dignified life.

The Special Rapporteur will present a report to a forthcoming session of the Human Rights Council on the main findings of her visit.

ENDS

**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. Ms 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 General Assembly](#) focusses on rights-based upgrading of informal settlements.

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