



Inhumane conditions in informal settlements a "global scandal", says UN rights expert

NEW YORK (18 October 2018) – Ignoring almost 900 million people living in overcrowded informal settlements is a global human rights scandal that governments must resolve, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing said today.

"The living conditions in informal settlements are one of the most pervasive violations of human rights globally and yet this is being ignored by most and exacerbated by many," said Leilani Farha in a [report](#) to the UN General Assembly.*

"The conditions that many suffer are inhumane – overcrowding, lack of basic services like toilets and running water, and complete insecurity. Many are in constant fear of having their homes bulldozed or destroyed," the Special Rapporteur said.

Farha described the housing challenge in Africa and Asia as immense. "In many cities in Africa, more than half of the population lives in informal settlements. In Asia, there are 520 million residents of informal settlements, often in areas that are vulnerable to floods, landslides or contamination."

Even in the richest countries, informal settlements or encampments are common. "In North American countries, I've visited encampments under highway overpasses deliberately deprived of portable toilets that are subject to having their tents and belongings swept away at any time," she said.

The Special Rapporteur said informal settlements are the result of "a flagrant disregard" of the right to housing in a wide range of policy areas, but at the same time must be recognized as incredible accomplishments and a claiming of rights to dignity and place. Residents create homes, culture and community life in the most adverse circumstances.

The report says States must stop stigmatizing and criminalising residents of informal settlements and instead build on the capacities of communities to claim and realize their rights. "The commitment of States in the Agenda for Sustainable Development to provide secure, adequate and affordable housing to all and to upgrade informal settlements by 2030 must be treated as a human rights imperative of the highest order," Farha said.

The Special Rapporteur's [report](#) includes 31 directives for upgrading informal settlements in compliance with the right to housing and other international human rights norms. The directives affirm the right of residents to participate in all aspects of upgrading. They underscore the obligation of States to facilitate community participation, avoid unnecessary relocation and cease the practice of forced evictions.

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](#) focuses on rights-based upgrading of informal settlements.

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.

For more information and media **requests** please contact: Gunnar Theissen at (+41 22 917 93 21 / gtheissen@ohchr.org) or in New York, Juli Perucca at (+1 613 983 7706 / juli.perucca@unhousingrapp.org)

For **media inquiries** related to other UN independent experts: Jeremy Laurence – Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / jlaurence@ohchr.org)

Tag and share - Twitter: @adequatehousing and Facebook: @righttohousing

This year is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: www.standup4humanrights.org.

