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End of Mission Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation Mr. Léo Heller, and Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Ms. Leilani Farha

13 December 2016

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Portuguese

Lisbon, 13 December 2016

As the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the right to adequate housing and the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, we address you today at the conclusion of our joint official visit to Portugal, which we undertook at the invitation of the Government from 5 to 13 December 2016. The objective of the visit was to identify the main obstacles hindering the full realization of the rights to housing, water and sanitation and to recommend legislation, policies and other measures for tackling these obstacles and for ensuring the enjoyment of these human rights by everyone in society.

We would like to thank the Government of Portugal for the invitation and organisation of the visit, and for the open and constructive dialogues that took place. We are grateful to the Government representatives and local authorities who met with us. We very much appreciate the spirit of openness with which we were able to engage with the authorities. During our stay we also met with various academics, civil society organisations, associations, and residents. *(See list of meetings and places visited at the end of this statement).* We thank everyone who took the time to meet with us, especially children, youth, women and men who generously shared their personal experiences, testimonies and living conditions with us; their contributions were vital to the success of our visit.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the following statement outlines

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the following statement outlines our preliminary findings and recommendations based on the information gathered prior to and during the visit. Our final reports will be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2017: for the housing mandate, it will be at the 34th session in March, and for the water and sanitation mandate, at the 36th session in September.

Since 2007, Portugal has faced an unprecedented economic crisis that has had an important impact in the country, particularly affecting economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to housing, water and sanitation of its inhabitants. Austerity measures imposed as part of the memorandum of understanding signed by the Government of Portugal in May 2011 with the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission (known as the Troika) and which ended in 2014, led to an increase in poverty rates, housing exclusion, lower social protection benefits and unaffordable access to public services.

While the country is currently in the process of economic recovery, having weathered the worst part of the storm, Portuguese residents still face serious long terms challenges: high levels of unemployment, cuts in wages (particularly in the public sector), higher taxation and an overall elevated risk of poverty for households that used to be above the poverty line before the crisis.

We are concerned by the effects following this process on the realization of human rights related to our mandates, particularly, the exclusion and discrimination experienced by the Roma (ciganos), who are mostly Portuguese nationals living in some of the most deplorable housing conditions, sometimes without any access to water and sanitation. Some persons of African origin, largely from former Portuguese colonies, like Cabo Verde, Mozambique, and Angola, are also among the poorest and most deprived in terms of access to adequate housing. We are equally concerned by the living conditions of homeless people, including a lack of water and sanitation facilities in public places, and the scarcity of shelters and hostels that adequately respond to their needs.

To tackle this situation, among other measures, it is vital to have legislative and institutional frameworks implemented together with policies that abide by human rights principles. Emphasis should be placed on the needs of people in vulnerable situations, including the “new poor” – those who have been pushed into poverty as a result of the austerity measures – who may not qualify for certain social security protections. The housing, water and sanitation sectors would benefit from implementing a clear human rights based approach in related policies, which would include principles such as: non-discrimination and equality, participation and accountability.

Against this backdrop, it is essential to underline that Portugal has ratified key international human rights instruments protecting the right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, water and sanitation, without discrimination, notably the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its Optional Protocol, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Portugal has also ratified the European Social Charter and the revised European Social Charter. Given Portugal’s strong commitment to international human rights principles, the Government has a clear obligation to ensure the implementation of these rights at all levels.

The primary role to respect, protect and fulfil human rights lies with the State: that is to say, the central government, local authorities and the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira. We noted some tensions between local and central governments, in particular each level of government on occasion suggesting the other was responsible for the full implementation of the rights to water, sanitation and housing. We would like to emphasize that the State is one single entity, regardless of internal administrative divisions and that all levels of the Portuguese Government are responsible for the realization of human rights. **We urge the Portuguese Government to stipulate explicit legal provisions, which oblige local authorities and the autonomous governments to realize human rights to water and sanitation, as well as the right to adequate housing and non-discrimination in this context.** Improved

meeting and non-discrimination in this context, improved communication and collaboration between all levels of government will lead to improved human rights results.

Now Léo Heller, the Special Rapporteur on human rights to water and sanitation, will address his preliminary findings from the visit.

Situation of human rights to water and sanitation: "The (incomplete) Portuguese miracle"

Portugal has undoubtedly achieved an outstanding progress in the water and sanitation sector over the last decades, which is largely recognized worldwide. Portugal now enjoys almost near universal water coverage and the coverage of sanitation services, although at a lower rate than water services, has also shown signs of progress. The quality of drinking water and the wastewater treatment has also experienced an impressive improvement. These achievements should be recognized and celebrated and I warmly commend the current and the past Portuguese governments and also the Portuguese society for this success. However, my assessment of the current situation through the human rights lens shows that the work is yet to be finished completely. Let me address some of the challenges I identified during the mission.

1. Reform of the Portuguese water sector

The reform of the Portuguese water sector has resulted in a very complex institutional architecture, in which a multitude of players has different roles. Through the various meetings I held with entities with varying responsibilities to realize the human rights to water and sanitation, I learned about the complexity behind the water that flows into Portuguese households and the wastewater that flows out of them. Although the above-mentioned institutional arrangement has been largely responsible for the great achievements in the sector, known as the "Portuguese miracle", I observed that currently, there exist different layers of tensions among relevant governmental entities. This situation is challenging the stability of the institutional framework and may undermine the progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation in the country. Let me now explain what I am referring to as "tensions" in the sector.

Tensions between the roles of the bulk providers (providers "em alta") and of those responsible for retail provision (provision "em baixa") have been present since the implementation of the reform and still remain strong in some parts of the country. The resistance of a number of municipalities to integrate the bulk provision system has resulted in the coexistence of different arrangements in the country and has possibly limited these municipalities from obtaining funding from the central government or the European Union. There are also tensions regarding the degree of centralization or decentralization of water provision, as well as the roles of the central government and the local authorities. The independence of the national regulator – ERSAR – is sometimes challenged by the central government, which argues for playing a larger role in key decisions, which may have implications on social policy, and by municipalities that argue their autonomy is being undermined. Another complaint I came across is the discomfort of some local authorities due to their inability to make their voice heard in decision-making processes regarding the bulk provision of water and sanitation as shareholders of the corporation.

This institutional arrangement may be the root cause of the situations that deserve attention under the human rights framework, particularly the affordability of water and sanitation for the population that are most vulnerable including the "new poor" that have emerged after the austerity measures. **Therefore, it is urgent to develop a comprehensive assessment of this institutional arrangement through a human rights perspective and I strongly recommend to the Portuguese Government to undertake such assessment.**

Let me now focus on affordability of water and sanitation services, one of the concerns that I have systematically observed during this mission.

2. Affordability of water and sanitation services

Human rights to water and sanitation do not mean that we should necessarily have water for free. However, it also does not mean that those

who do not have the economic capacity to pay are deprived of such services.

During the 10-day visit, I had the chance to take a look at a number of water bills and the prices on the bills brought to my attention some concerning situations. I could identify from the bills I saw that the proportion of income that goes into water and sanitation, may reach more than 10 per cent. This level of income commitment is tremendously high for the unemployed, retirees, and those that are excluded from income generating activities.

I have learned of the different social tariff and family tariff (“tarifa familiar”) measures that are available. I have also learned that these measures are optional and not highly sought after. In this sense, I welcome the recently approved recommendation of the Parliament to automatically apply social tariff scheme for water and sanitation. The automated system of social tariff is in line with upholding the dignity of those people who otherwise would have to request their inclusion in the system and it will certainly raise the number of people who will benefit from the social tariff. However, although this recommendation is very important, it is an insufficient step because the municipalities are not legally obligated to implement the measures. **In light of this, I urge ERSAR, the Ministry of the Environment and other related institutions to strongly advocate for the implementation of this measure. Furthermore, my view is that the criteria for eligibility and level of discounts to be provided by the social tariff require a more careful evaluation.** For example, it does not seem sufficient to protect those in most vulnerable situations by only exempting the fixed part of the tariffs (“tarifa de disponibilidade”), as mentioned in ERSAR’s draft proposal on Tariff Regulation. Let me provide a concrete example: a Lisbon household that consumes 15 cubic meters of water in a given month, when it benefits from social tariff, will only have 30 per cent discount from the total bill. Even with this discount, the bill can still represent a great financial burden if there is only one member of the household working and receiving the minimum wage.

I would also like to highlight the different water tariffs across municipalities: residents in smaller municipalities with scattered populations pay higher tariffs and, contradictorily, these areas are where the average income is lower. According to ERSAR’s report, the difference of water prices between the municipalities can be up to 20 times for those households that consume 10 cubic meters of water per month. This asymmetry is a huge one and it is unfair. **The Government should take this into consideration in the on-going discussions on tariff regulation by ERSAR and other policies related to water and sanitation.** For instance, differentiating the bulk tariff, namely, by charging less to households of smaller municipalities, could be a way to ensure a harmonized water tariff across the country.

All issues related to unaffordable access to services by groups in vulnerable situation are resulting in different situations and degrees of disconnections due to non-payment arising from lack of economic capacity. **Disconnections, on the grounds of economic incapacity, need to be properly addressed given that under the international human rights law, it is considered a human rights violation.**

I urge the Government of Portugal to address these various dimensions of affordability, a very key human rights principle.

3. Accessibility to water and sanitation services

Accessibility is another key element of the human rights to water and sanitation. Despite the near universal access to water, I emphasize that according to PensaAR 2020, 5 per cent of the Portuguese population still do not have access to piped water. I am concerned that this portion of population is being left behind. As for access to sanitation, approximately 20 per cent do not have access to sewerage network and rely on individual solution, for instance, usage of septic tanks. I observed that, in some cases, this population does not have any support from the municipal authorities for construction and maintenance of these individual solutions such as removing and disposing the sludge from septic tanks. I learned that in Azores archipelago, there exist guidelines

for local authorities to support households that use individual solutions, which can be an example to be extended throughout the country.

Portugal needs to develop more accurate studies to identify the profile of those who are being left behind. It is not possible to have adequate policies for what we do not know well. **In order to address this, Portugal's census and other surveys should disaggregate data on water and sanitation access by wealth level, migratory status, ethnic groups and other grounds of discrimination.**

4. Legal framework

With the improved access to water and sanitation in Portugal, one can ask "does Portugal need a new law on the human rights to water and sanitation?" The answer is "yes. The Portuguese Constitution does not explicitly mention the human rights to water and sanitation, but that does not mean that individuals in Portugal are not entitled to enjoy these rights and it certainly does not mean that the Portuguese Government does not have the obligation to progressively realize them. Both the individuals' rights to water and sanitation and the State's obligations are derived from international instruments notably, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its Optional Protocol, as well as Portugal's support to the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions, which explicitly recognized the human rights to water and sanitation.

However, it is essential that the Portuguese Parliament approve the draft bill that bestows legal recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation at the national level. I would like to underscore the importance of explicit legislative recognition of these rights. Having a national law is key in ensuring the justiciability of the human rights to water and sanitation. In other words, it is crucial that individuals and groups who are alleged victims of violation of their rights to water and sanitation are able to file complaint before a judicial body, to request legal remedies and to have those remedies enforced.

Ten days are not sufficient time to fully understand all the details of each and every aspect of the situation of human rights to water and sanitation in a country such as Portugal. Today is the last day of the official visit but the visit does not end today. Rather, this statement marks the next steps in the continued dialogue with the various stakeholders. After the visit, I will gather further information, provide an analysis of and recommendation to the issues that I have mentioned today, together with other issues. I am intending to further elaborate on subjects such as: (1) concessions, (2) improvements in the tariff subsidy for large families, (3) balancing economic sustainability and affordability, (4) access to toilets for transgender in schools, (5) access to services for homeless, Roma population (*ciganos*) and other minorities, (6) support for construction and maintenance of individual solutions for sanitation by municipalities, among others.

This is not an exhaustive list. I am looking forward to the continued dialogue with the Portuguese Government and other stakeholders.

The Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing and non-discrimination in this context, Ms Leilani Farha, will now present her preliminary findings and some recommendations:

The right to adequate housing

I am sympathetic to the tremendous pressures on the Government of Portugal to address the economic crisis, and to tackle complex and long standing deficiencies in the housing sector. Most officials with whom I met noted the centrality of housing issues and the dire situation facing many, including the new poor or at risk of poverty who are rarely prioritized in housing policies and programmes. I am acutely aware that addressing housing needs is neither cheap nor simple to solve with short-term measures. I therefore encourage authorities at all levels to continue to explore creative measures in compliance with international human rights standards and principles.

Overview

Portugal's housing sector has particular characteristics that impact on the implementation of the right to adequate housing. It has exceptionally high home ownership rates for the European region (75 per cent of the

population). At the same time within a housing stock of approximately 5 million conventional dwellings, between 10 per cent and 12 per cent of units are standing vacant and/or slated for demolition, 3.4% of which are dilapidated and uninhabitable.

As a result of the emphasis on homeownership, Portugal also has a limited rental sector (at 20 per cent in 2011) with only 2 per cent of all housing stock allocated to social housing, one of the lowest in Europe. Until recently and for several decades, Portugal had stringent rental legislation which froze rental rates regardless of income levels and market value of the unit. As a result, in central locations of Lisbon and Porto, many people were paying very low rents and had old rental contracts. In turn, it was common for landlords to neglect and abandon properties because they were not generating enough income to ensure proper maintenance.

From the late 1970s until 2008, housing construction flourished in Portugal. During this time, the number of houses nearly doubled, and at various times, access to credit for housing at low interest rates was readily available. Real estate boomed. As new constructions rose, the number of tenants decreased from 61 to 24 per cent between 1990 and 2001 (INE 2012). 20 to 25 per cent of the labour force was engaged in construction by the end of the '90s, including unskilled workers who migrated from rural areas to the main cities, as well as migrants from former colonies in Africa. Now that figure stands at approximately 6 per cent for 2016.

National institutions, legislation and access to justice

The right to adequate housing is recognized in article 65 of the Constitution. It is defined as the right for a person and their family to an adequately sized dwelling, with hygienic conditions and protection of privacy. Article 65 offers housing policy guidelines as to how the right should be implemented, covering a number of issues such as cooperation with autonomous regions and local authorities to promote construction of low-cost and social housing, the stimulation of private construction and initiatives to resolve housing problems.

There is no National Housing Framework Law, which could be an essential tool for individuals to claim their right to housing as defined by the Constitution and international instruments. Such a law can also ensure coherence and long-term vision in the sector. In place are a number of piecemeal policies and programmes developed at different periods, with the aim of addressing the most pressing housing issues. Some of the policies and programmes are designed and approved at the Parliament level for national implementation in conjunction with local authorities. **I urge the Government to adopt a National Housing Framework Law formulated in consultation with relevant stakeholders and which incorporates international human rights principles.**

Since its creation in 2006, the Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute (IHRU- Instituto de Habitação e Reabilitação Urbana) is a key national public institution in charge of coordinating housing policy with municipalities, providing and managing social housing stock around the country, and ensuring financing for a number of programs (especially related to rehabilitation/refurbishing of urban housing).

Social Housing

In all of Portugal there are only 120,000 units of social housing, 15,000 of which are managed by the IHRU and the rest of which are owned and managed by the municipalities. The city of Lisbon is the largest social housing provider in Portugal with 26,000 units. The waiting lists for social housing are long. IHRU, for example, reports 6,000 people are on their wait lists with wait periods being on average 2 years. I was told that wait lists in the Municipality of Lisbon and in Porto, a city with higher rates of poverty than Lisbon, the wait can be anywhere between 2 and 7 years for some categories of units.

In 1993, the Programa Especial de Realojamiento (PER) was established for the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. Its main objective was to provide rehousing to households identified in a universal survey conducted between 1993-95 as living in 'non-classical housing'. These

were mainly 'shacks' (barracas), self-built homes made of wood, zinc or other perishable materials, on both public and private land, as well as Roma communities living in camps and other communities living in informal settlements. Under this programme municipalities acquire buildings or dwellings that they refurbish in order to relocate those households included in the survey. Those who were not part of the survey do not qualify for PER and have been living for over 20 years in informal settlements or grossly inadequate private market housing, at risk of eviction into homelessness.

Under the PER program 17,000 social housing units were often built on the peripheries of cities. As a result of concentration of social housing, there are some concerns around ghettoization and social exclusion including due to a lack of efficient transportation to city centres.

In Lisbon, for example, I visited social housing that was in serious state of neglect and disrepair. In one particularly deprived neighbourhood, built 16 years ago, I witnessed crumbling and cracked foundations and walls, exposed live wires, sewage problems, a lack of parks where children can play, overcrowding and unclean and poorly lit common areas. In some cases empty units were simply boarded up, remaining unused despite exceptionally long waiting lists.

Funding for the building and maintenance of social housing in 2014 is just 0.7 per cent of the GDP, representing a very small portion of the GDP, and a retrogression of 0.2 per cent from 2008. The building of new social housing is not on the Government's agenda, nor the agenda of the two municipalities I visited. It seems clear to me that in keeping with the Memorandum of Understanding, the focus of policies and programs of both the National Housing Institute (IHRU) as well as the municipality of Lisbon are on creating private market-based housing options for the working poor. I was told that in Porto not a single new unit of social housing had been built since the 1990s. This was explained as being related to a lack of available resources. While this may be true, in my estimation it may also be an ideological position in favour of the liberalization of the housing market, one of the cornerstones of the Troika Memorandum of Understanding. That being said, I understand that changes to the eligibility criteria for social housing and the manner in which it is being allocated are afoot in Lisbon, though it is difficult to determine if this new system will result in faster placement of tenants into social housing and whether it will address shortages in social housing supply.

Under international human rights law, social housing is certainly not the only reasonable response to housing problems, but in light of the countries' socio-economic and demographic makeup, it is surely part of the answer. **At a minimum, existing stock must be kept in good repair, and units should never be left vacant when waiting lists are long and need is large.**

I suggest that the Government carry out a study to accurately assess and project the percentage of the population requiring social housing, subsidized housing or rent controlled housing. It must then ensure the supply of affordable housing for those with the lowest incomes and those on long waiting lists can meet the demand on a long-term basis. This will likely require an increase in investment.

Informal settlements and 'Ilhas'

Officially there were approximately 6,612 non-classical dwellings in 2011, representing less than 0.11 per cent of the total. The lack of sufficient available social housing as well as the lack of a rent supplement program, or other private market access-to-housing solutions for people living in poverty, means that these populations – Roma, people of African descent, people with disabilities, and single parents – often have no choice but to either live in informal settlements in the worst conditions or to rent the 'cheapest' (yet not always affordable) units in the private market, many of which also have grossly inadequate conditions. The informal settlements of the Roma and people of African descent as well as the 'Ilhas' homes in Porto are perhaps the best example of this.

Informal settlements I visited such as those in Loures, where Roma and

people of African descent are forced to live, are a shameful blight. Some of these communities are living without electricity. Their homes are set amidst garbage, dark, poorly constructed out of tin and debris, exposed to rain, wind and overheating in the summer months. These are housing conditions one hopes never to see and certainly not in a developed country that has ratified international human rights instruments protecting the right to adequate housing. I learned that contrary to international human rights law, a number of families have been evicted from their homes in Amadora or their homes demolished, and as a consequence they were left homeless, and many more are currently threatened with eviction.

Ilhas are a unique form of housing found only in Porto. Established in the 19th century for workers, these homes are very small, measuring on average just 16sq meters, and house some of the poorest families in Portugal. Hidden from view, the Ilhas are located down narrow lane ways. There are 957 of these homes scattered throughout Porto. The vast majority are owned privately and tenants pay rent to often absent landlords.

The conditions in most of these tiny places can only be described as grossly inadequate, and at times heart breaking. Miniature in size, they can only reasonably accommodate one person, though most are occupied by 3 and 4 person families. Many have ad hoc sanitation facilities, sometimes outside of the actual home, or without doors for privacy or a place to bathe. While most of these homes have electricity and running water, some are "off the grid" and thus have no electricity security and face disconnections. Many of the homes have leaking roofs, rodents, and offer no protection from the cold or the heat. I met several tenants who said that they had requested repairs to their units but the landlords had not obliged.

Of deep concern is the number of elderly people living in these homes, many with disabilities or with limited mobility, who are completely isolated, rarely able to leave their homes except to attend doctor's appointments and even then at considerable expense. Also of very serious concern is that a number of residents, including single mothers, have been told their children may be taken away by welfare authorities due to their housing conditions, and yet no alternative housing options have been made available to them. Most of the tenants I met residing in Isla have little to no income beyond a meager pension or very low social integration income (189.9 euros per month, and varies according to household composition) and most have been on social housing wait lists for years.

To comply with its international human rights obligations, the housing conditions in informal settlements and the Ilhas must be assessed and addressed on an urgent and priority basis. Demolitions and evictions that result in homelessness must not take place. Children must not be taken away from their parents for lack of adequate housing; families must be provided with adequate housing. Plans for these communities must be developed and implemented in consultation with the affected populations and should include key human rights principles such as: security of tenure, in situ relocation, access to basic services including water, sanitation and electricity, affordability and dignified living conditions.

Homelessness

I learned that there may be a high level of homelessness in Portugal, some of which is hidden. There appears to be a lack of national statistics. Lack of social housing and affordable rental housing or sufficient shelters suggests also that many people may be living in or at severe risk homelessness, with new homeless populations emerging, like youth. Many homeless people have no other option than private rentals of the worst possible kind, living in boarding houses that lack toilets, privacy or are overcrowded.

While a participatory process resulted in the design of a National Strategy on Homelessness (2009-2015), it was not provided adequate resources and apparently not implemented. I was pleased to learn that, unlike in many other jurisdictions in Europe and elsewhere, homeless people are not criminalized in Portugal. I am pleased to hear that there are plans for

not criminalized in Portugal. I am pleased to hear that there are plans for a new strategy and **encourage participatory approach, the inclusion of human rights principles and its implementation consistently across the country. I strongly recommend that the Government include in its new homelessness strategy a commitment to end homelessness by 2030 in keeping with its obligations under international human rights law, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.**

Touristification and the rental market

Tourism is an important aspect of Portugal's recovery from the economic crisis, and has assisted in revitalizing historic city centres like Porto which were subject to severe social degradation marked by dilapidated and abandoned buildings, drugs, violence and prostitution. The historic centre of both Lisbon and Porto are now emerging as major tourist destinations, with Porto's centre having been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Unbridled touristification can have a significant and negative impact on the implementation of the right to housing for the most vulnerable populations. This has emerged as an issue of concern in the historic centres of both Lisbon and Porto. To some extent, touristification has been facilitated by legislative and fiscal changes in the last few years.

The current urban rent regime resulted in the liberalization of rental accommodation older than 1990, allowing landlords to increase rents up to market value. In some areas rents have doubled in a short period of time, making them unaffordable to many families. When a landlord chooses to sell or rehabilitate their property many of these families are likely to have to leave their neighbourhoods for lack of affordability.

Some safeguards were provided for the most vulnerable families, including a rent increase transition period of 5 years, with specific protection for persons older than 65 years and for persons with disabilities. **I was pleased to learn Parliament is considering extending these safeguards to up to 10 years, though broader protections would be useful.**

I was concerned to learn of the new rental regime which has made the eviction of tenants much easier than in the past. In fact evictions due to arrears, for example, are now an administrative matter and can be fast tracked using the Balco Nacional de Arrendamiento (BNA) – a web-based platform. **The Government should review its eviction procedures to ensure they adequately protect the rights of tenants, particularly not to be evicted into homelessness. It must ensure tenants are made aware of their ability to challenge an eviction, and that they have access to legal aid or other legal supports to challenge an eviction in court.**

Many property owners, availing themselves of the liberalized eviction laws, are choosing to either rehabilitate their properties and convert them to luxury rental units, or short term rentals (hostels, AirBnB suits, and hotels), or are selling their properties to foreign investors who will do the same. Short term rentals for tourism affect the housing market in two ways: they reduce the stock of long-term housing rental units available on the market as more affordable housing is transferred from the residential market to the hotel market, and since nightly rates are, on average, more affordable than hotel rooms but more lucrative than standard renting prices, it creates an incentive for property owners to 'hotelize' homes or buildings, which in turn reduces stock of available units while also increasing the price of housing in that neighbourhood.

I learned that the Government has taken some modest steps to curb the proliferation of short-term rentals by taxing, at a higher rate, developers and property owners who develop short term rentals. I understand the Government has also introduced a program which subsidizes rents in the historic city centres so that those living above the poverty line, who earn on average 850 euros/month, will pay 30-40 per cent less than market value. There is more governments in Portugal can do in this regard.

Central and municipal governments must develop a common vision for cities in Portugal with a view to ensuring they are places of inclusion rather than places predominantly for the affluent or tourists. Governments must adopt new regulatory mechanisms, including considering re-introducing rent controls, requiring special approvals for short-term rentals, and preventing displacement through touristification.

Governments should examine the practices in other jurisdictions to determine other mechanisms that might protect areas of cities that are vulnerable to touristification and property speculation.

ENDS

Information about the visit

List of official meetings: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure, Ministry of Labor, Solidarity and Social Security, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Justice, Parliament Committee on the Environment, Territorial Planning, Decentralization, Local Government and Housing, Institute of Statistics, Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation, High Commission for Migrations, Ombudsman, Tribunal de Contas, Municipality of Lisboa, Municipality of Porto, Municipality of Cabeceiras de Basto, Municipality of Celorica de Basto, Portuguese Environmental Agency, Empresa Portuguesa de Águas Livres (EPAL); Agluuas de Portugal, Portuguese Water Partnership, The Water and Waste Services Regulation Authority (ERSAR); Inter-municipal Association of Water in the Setubal region; Empresa Municipal DOMUS-Porto.

Places visited: During the visit we also visited and interacted with communities living in Loures, Amadora, Bairro da Cova da Moura, Vidigueira, Campanhã (Porto), Ilha de Bela Vista, Bairro de Aleixo, and Porto.

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