

Special event on Affordable Housing and Ending Homelessness

High Level Meeting

Wednesday 27 April 2022

13:15-14:30

Concept note and draft agenda

Background

Homelessness is the extreme manifestation of the failure to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to housing and to an adequate standard of living. It affects people's ability to access fundamental rights such as education, employment, healthcare, and participation in public life. The social isolation and stigmatisation that characterise homelessness make it harder to break out of the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

As the agency within the United Nations system mandated to promote socially and environmentally sustainable cities for all, UN-Habitat has made it clear that tackling homelessness is a precondition for the full realisation of human rights, as well as our ability to meet Agenda 2030.

As mentioned by Ms Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat's Executive Director, during the High-Level Political Forum 2021, "understanding homelessness and accounting for the people experiencing it, is a precondition to understand our progresses in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. How can we report on progresses made towards ending poverty, if we lack data on how many people are experiencing homelessness?"

Further, since March 2020, the imperative to recognise and solve homelessness took up a new meaning during and in aftermath of the health and socio-economic crisis initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disproportionately affecting people experiencing homelessness, the pandemic also left thousands at risk of losing their homes — especially among already marginalised groups.

The analysis carried out by UN-Habitat to prepare the the flagship publication "Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future" confirmed that adequate housing is key in preventing and building resilience to systemic shocks. To this end, the Report concludes that to tackle climate and housing emergencies a new social contract based on housing for all is needed.

"Our Common Agenda", presented by the UN Secretary General in September 2021, also calls for a renewed social contract to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. Among the four core elements of the new social contract there is the right to adequate housing for all, and the call for governments to respect, protect and fulfil this fundamental right.

Glimpses of what this means in practice have been seen throughout the emergency phase of the COVID-19 crisis that obliged countries and cities to refocus their priorities. The Pandemic created greater collaboration opportunities than ever before, unlocking innovation, and showing new possibilities to build more equal, just, resilient and healthy cities.

Yet, with the phasing out of the many measures introduced at the peak of the crisis, a rise in evictions due to loss of income and steeper housing prices are becoming evident. Groups already marginalised find themselves once again at the wrong end of the spectrum, and inequalities widen.

As stressed by the UN Secretary General in its report on Our Common Agenda *“the choices we make, or fail to make, today could result in further breakdown, or a breakthrough to a greener, better, safer future. The choice is ours to make; but we will not have this chance again. Now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights. People need to see results reflected in their daily lives”*.

The resolution *“Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)”*, tabled by Madagascar on behalf of the African Group, and adopted in November 2021 at the General Assembly represents a strong commitment by Member States to step up to the challenge and ensure that human rights are protected, respected, and fulfilled, and that no one is left behind.

The resolution recognises that homelessness is mainly driven by structural causes — rather than personal behaviours — and discusses the intersection with poverty, climate change, health, housing prices, and discrimination. It calls on Member States and local governments, in consultation with other stakeholders — especially persons with lived experiences of homelessness —to develop holistic programmes and policies cutting across different sectors. It also encompasses preventive strategies and policies aimed at eradicating the root causes of homelessness, in particular improved access to affordable housing, enhanced social protection measures, and combating discrimination. Finally, it encourages Member States to harmonize the measurement, collection, and disaggregation of data on homelessness.

The Resolution gives policymakers, academics, civil society, and private sector representatives a solid basis to partner and build on to effectively end homelessness.

Objectives of the event

- Create a global movement of national and local governments to support a renewed social contract underpinned by housing for all as key for the concrete realization of human rights, social inclusion and protection;
- Strengthen awareness of the centrality of housing and ending homelessness to deliver on the New Urban Agenda and the Agenda2030;
- Present the latest developments on ending and preventing homelessness and ensuring access to housing for all, including the SG Report that will be presented at the 77th Session of the General Assembly focusing on progress and challenges in the implementation of inclusive social development policies and programmes to address homelessness in the aftermath of COVID-19;
- Discuss existing challenges and initiatives;
- Highlight the complementary roles of member states, local governments, civil society, academia, and private sector in ending homelessness and ensuring housing for all.

Proposed Agenda

13:15 – 13:20 Opening: Lived experience by Rob Robinson, member of the US Human Rights Network

13:20 – 13:30 Opening remarks

- Representative of Madagascar
- Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

13:30 – 14:00 Panel: *Ending homelessness, a priority for our common agenda and an equitable future*

- Yves Leterme, Former Belgian Prime Minister and Chair of the European Platform to End Homelessness
- Yanella Posente RED CALLE Project Coordinator. National Directorate of Comprehensive Protection in Infringement Situations Ministry of Social Development, Uruguay (tbc)
- Rosanne Haggerty, Founder and president of Community Solutions and member of the Advisory Committee of the Institute of Global Homelessness
- Neil Munslow, Newcastle City Council, United Kingdom
- Tschwane, South Africa

14:00 – 14:25 – Exchange of views with participants

14:25 – 14:30 – Closing and next steps