



TÉLÉCOPIE • FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

DATE: 29 April 2020

A/TO: To all Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office at Geneva, UN agencies, National Human Rights Institutions and Civil Society Organizations

DE/FROM: Beatriz Balbin
Chief
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Beatriz Balbin".

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PAGES: 3 (Y COMPRIS CETTE PAGE/INCLUDING THIS PAGE)

OBJET/SUBJECT: **COVID-19 Guidance notes by the 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**

Please find attached letter and a guidance note by the 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.



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Mandate of the 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

29 April 2020

Excellencies,

Dear representatives of UN agencies, national human rights institutions and civil society,

It is now clear that housing has become the frontline defence against the coronavirus and home has rarely been more of a life or death situation. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, States across the world have prescribed that individuals and families “stay home”, wash their hands and practice physical distancing. As the pandemic continues to spread, it is becoming increasingly clear that following these orders is only possible for the privileged.

Approximately 1.8 billion people live in homelessness, informal settlements and grossly inadequate housing, often in overcrowded conditions, lacking access to water and sanitation – making it impossible to adhere to the prescription against COVID-19 and rendering them particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus.

For a great number of households across the world, the pandemic has meant job loss, reduced work hours, unpaid sick leave, or an inability to undertake informal sector work due to lockdowns. Both renters and homeowners are now experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety and stress, and many are unable to pay their rent or mortgage and utility bills.

The pandemic has shown us the importance of home. I am heartened to see that many States across the world have responded in ways that are consistent with previously ignored human rights obligations that would have been unthinkable just a few weeks ago. Many national and sub-national governments have invoked bans on evictions, suspended rental and mortgage payments, provided water and sanitation services within informal settlements and urgently worked to find shelter for those living in homelessness.

Many protection gaps, however, continue to exist for vulnerable groups, and the short and long term effects of emergency measures must be considered and assessed based on human rights obligations to ensure they protect the right to housing during the pandemic. These measures must also lay the groundwork for the enjoyment of the right to housing after the pandemic, so States may build back better. To assist in this regard, I have developed a series

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of short COVID-19 Guidance Notes in consultation with experts from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

1. [Protecting residents in informal settlements](#)
2. [Protection for those living in homelessness](#)
3. [Protecting renters and mortgage payers](#)
4. [Prohibition of evictions](#)
5. [Protecting housing from financialization and building back a better future](#)

You can find all of the COVID-19 Guidance Notes here:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/COVID19RightToHousing.aspx>

The fifth Guidance Note is forward looking, with a focus on promoting housing as a social good rather than a commodity and implementing the right to adequate housing in rebuilding national housing systems.

I would be grateful if you could bring these Guidance Notes to the attention of the responsible ministries or emergency task-forces coordinating the response to COVID-19 in your country. I hope that they are also useful for developing adequate policies and programmes at national or local level, as well as for monitoring the right to adequate housing by national authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society.

It has been a great pleasure to have served as Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing for the past six years. I would like to thank you all for your support and collaboration during my mandate. As of 1 May 2020, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal will assume my functions as Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing. I hope that he can continue to rely on your support and your efforts to protect and strengthen the right to housing both at home and globally.

Though my tenure as Rapporteur is soon over, I remain at your disposition as Global Director of The Shift, a worldwide movement to secure the human right to housing (www.make-the-shift.org) – established in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Governments. I look forward to working collaboratively with you in this new role.

Yours sincerely,



Leilani Farha

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