

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Immediate call to halt all Tenant Evictions, Utility Disconnections, and provide Emergency Rental Support

WINNIPEG, MB: Anti-poverty advocates are calling on the Province of Manitoba to ensure no tenant is evicted from their home or experiences utility disconnections effective immediately. Manitoba should join other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world who have taken leadership in this area.

Evicting people into homelessness during this pandemic goes against the calls of our provincial state of emergency related to social distancing and protecting public health. The Residential Tenancies Branch must suspend all hearings, including mediated agreements, that may result in evictions.

The public health crisis of COVID-19 only exacerbates the disproportionate challenges for low-income renters in our province. Shutting off heat and water for people who are already vulnerable is inhumane. The City of Winnipeg needs to follow the lead of Manitoba Hydro and state clearly that Water and Waste will suspend water cut-offs.

Many households are now facing a loss of income due to sudden unemployment, making rent and utility payments improbable for the foreseeable future. An immediate emergency rent relief program must be implemented to assist these households.

Support for renters and low-income people has been noticeably absent from announcements from all levels of government so far. When asked about these tenant related issues today, Premier Pallister indicated that more measures are on the way next week for individual Manitobans. We expect the actions outlined above to be included in next week's announcement.

The Right to Housing Coalition is a group of individuals and organizations concerned about the shortage of affordable (including social) housing. The Coalition recommends housing policies and programs to three levels of government that would result in decent housing for all.

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a coalition of groups and individuals working to end poverty in Manitoba.

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Contacts:

Kirsten Bernas - Chair, Right to Housing Provincial Working Group
provincial@righttohousing.ca, 204-688-7050

Michael Barkman - Chair, Make Poverty History Manitoba
chair@makepovertyhistorymb.com, 204-797-0128

“Housing, the front line defence against the COVID-19 outbreak,” says UN expert

[GENEVA](#) (18 March 2020) – As Governments worldwide are relying on people to stay home to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, they must take urgent measures to prevent anyone falling into homelessness and ensure access to adequate housing for those without, a UN expert said.

“Housing has become the front line defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation,” said Leilani Farha, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing.

“I am deeply concerned about two specific population groups: those living in emergency shelters, homelessness, and informal settlements, and those facing job loss and economic hardship which could result in mortgage and rental arrears and evictions.”

According to the expert, approximately 1.8 billion people worldwide live in homelessness and grossly inadequate housing, often in overcrowded conditions, lacking access to water and sanitation – making them particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus, as they are often suffering from multiple health issues.

“I am urging States to take extraordinary measures to secure the right to housing for all to protect against the pandemic. Good practices are emerging in a few States, including: moratoriums on evictions due to rental and mortgage arrears; deferrals of mortgage payments for those affected by the virus; extension of winter moratoriums on forced evictions of informal settlements; and increased access to sanitation and emergency shelter spaces for homeless people,” Farha said.

While significant, further measures are required to curb the risk for these vulnerable groups and address the growing infection rates, the Special Rapporteur said.

At a minimum, to ensure protection of those living in homelessness or grossly inadequate housing, States must: cease all evictions; provide emergency housing with services for those who are affected by the virus and must isolate; ensure that the enforcement of containment measures (eg: curfews) does not lead to the punishment of anyone based on their housing status; provide equal access to testing and health care; and provide adequate housing which may require the implementation of extraordinary measures as appropriate in a state of emergency, including using vacant and abandoned units and available short-term rentals.

With respect to those facing job loss and economic hardship, States must: provide direct financial assistance for or defer rental and mortgage payments; enact a moratorium on evictions due to arrears; introduce rental stabilization or reduction measures; and, at least for the duration of the pandemic, suspend utility costs and surcharges.

“Measures are being introduced and significant resources allocated to mitigate against the economic downturn caused by COVID-19, such as lowering interest rates. There is a risk that such measures will enable global financial actors to use the pandemic and the misfortunes of many to dominate housing markets without regard for human rights standards, as they did in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis,” the Special Rapporteur said. “States must prevent the predatory practices of institutional investors in the area of residential real estate.

“By ensuring access to secure housing with adequate sanitation, States will not only protect the lives of those who are homeless or living in informal settlements but will help protect the entire world’s population by flattening the curve of CV19,” the UN expert concluded.

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.