
GLOBAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION

An Urgent Call for Governments to Secure Human Rights

Monday, December 7, 2020

[Watch the Global Homelessness Action video]

“Safe housing, healthy environments, and healthy living is not a privilege. When you are you going to provide us the rights of a human being?” – Pepper [Los Angeles, USA]

As of today, 150 million people around the world are living in homelessness. That's equivalent to the entire population of the UK and France combined.

They live in abandoned buildings in [Georgia](#), under plastic sheets beside highways in [India](#), on the heavily policed streets of [Los Angeles](#), and in tents behind subway stations in [South Korea](#).

Homelessness is everywhere. It does not distinguish between wealthy countries or poor countries, children or elders, the employed or the unemployed. It is a human rights violation of the highest order that governments can no longer ignore.

How can you pay rent if you've lost your job? How can you wash your hands regularly without access to water? How can you physically distance if you share a room with 10 other people? How can you “stay home” if you don't have one?

COVID-19 has exacerbated the housing crisis and revealed it for what it truly is: a human rights calamity, decades in the making. Never before has access to an adequate and affordable home been such a stark matter of life or death.

The pandemic should have compelled governments around the world to take urgent measures to eliminate homelessness in line with human rights obligations. Instead, so many of our governments continue to fail people experiencing homelessness and even criminalize them for having nowhere to go.

As advocates and service providers, we know firsthand that the living conditions of people in encampments and on the streets are an assault on dignity. They spend their days trying to avoid infection while searching for clean water, toilets, healthcare, and [food for their children and themselves](#). They are [ticketed, harassed, and assaulted by police](#). They have [sleepless nights worrying for their safety](#) and wondering how they will make it through the next day.

The suffering of 150 million people without access to adequate housing, water, and sanitation services is unimaginable. But imagine the power of 150 million people claiming their political voice and demanding their human rights.

Convened by The Shift, the [Global Homelessness Action](#) is an ad-hoc coalition of more than 30 organizations from 20 different countries as well as hundreds of advocates from around the world who have come together to support the human rights claims of people living in homelessness and amplify their testimonies during this precarious time. We echo their assertion that homelessness is not the result of personal failure, but rather is the failure of governments to implement the right to housing and other human rights, including the right to life, security of the person, health, and freedom from cruel and inhuman treatment.

"I thought that the government existed to look out for our health and well-being. I want my government to respect my right to adequate housing." – Jason [Victoria, Canada]

As the pandemic persists, governments must respond to the claims made by people experiencing homelessness to secure their right to adequate housing, in line with their commitments under international human rights law. To this end, we call on all governments to:

- [1] **Engage people living in homelessness as rights holders and experts in their own lives, not as criminals or beneficiaries of charity.** Guarantee meaningful consultation with these experts when developing laws, policies, and programs that affect them. Recovery from the pandemic depends upon the participation of people with lived experience of homelessness.
- [2] **Immediately provide adequate accommodation to all people living 'rough' or on the streets, ensuring access to water, sanitation, food, social supports, and health services during the pandemic and beyond.** Emergency accommodation must transition into permanent, adequate housing with social supports as needed. Governments must act quickly to permanently house people living on the streets to ensure they will not be pushed back into homelessness once the pandemic is over.
- [3] **Place people living in homelessness at the forefront of all COVID-19 economic recovery plans by recognizing them as a protected and priority group in all areas of action.** On the understanding that COVID-19 only compounds existing global threats, including climate change, systemic racism, and ever-deepening inequality, recovery plans should outline how governments will prevent and end homelessness in the shortest amount of time possible.
- [4] **Stop criminalizing people living on the streets and activities necessary for their human survival.** Ensure that people living in homelessness are not fined, punished, or assaulted in the enforcement of COVID-19 containment measures. Terminate law enforcement practices that increase their marginalization, including street 'sweeps' and the confiscation or destruction of personal property.
- [5] **Ensure people living in homelessness have access to free legal information, advice, and remedies regarding violations of their right to housing and other human rights.**

This list of demands is being delivered to governments around the world. We call on all governments to act urgently and expeditiously. As Cristian in Buenos Aires says, there is no time to waste:

"I demand that the government please help us because we are dying. Housing is not a whim; it is a human right. The street is no place to live, much less to die."

– Cristian [Buenos Aires, Argentina]

Sincerely,



Leilani Farha, Global Director of The Shift on behalf of the Global Homelessness Action

Argentina

Centro de Estudios y Acción por la Igualdad
Proyecto 7

Canada

A Way Home Canada
Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Canadian Urban Institute

Ethiopia

Hold My Hand

Europe

FEANTSA

Finland

The Salvation Army, Finland
Y-Foundation (Y-Säätiö)

France

Fondation Abbé Pierre

Georgia

George Tchanchuria, Alterbridge University
NEED - The Movement for Social Justice

Germany

Karuna

Hong Kong

Justice Centre Hong Kong

Hungary

Utcajogász Egyesület (Streetlawyer Association)

India

Housing and Land Rights Network

Ireland

Participation and the Practice of Rights

The Global Homelessness Action is an international digital initiative that provides people experiencing homelessness the opportunity to collectively claim their right to housing and demand urgent action from governments through [video, audio, and written testimonies](#).

Convened by The Shift, the Action has brought together 30 organizations and hundreds of advocates from 20 different countries to support the human rights of people living in homelessness. Learn more at [MakeTheShift.org/HomelessnessAction](#).

Italy

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

Mexico

Habitat International Coalition, Latin America

New Zealand

The Shift Aotearoa

Nigeria

Justice and Empowerment Initiatives - Nigeria
Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation
Slum Dwellers International

Slovakia

Nadácia DEDO

South Korea

Homeless Action

Spain

ASSÍS Centre d'Accollida
PlatDESC-España (PlatESCR-Spain)

UK

End Youth Homelessness Cymru
Llamau

USA

Daughters of Charity
Institute of Global Homelessness
Los Angeles Community Action Network
Love & Justice in the Streets
The United Nations Working Group to End
Homelessness
UNANIMA International