



UNITED STATES MISSION
TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA

September 21, 2015

Ms. 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
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Ms. Farha:

Thank you for your letter dated April 23, 2015. The United States fully supports the 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, and we appreciate the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We note the importance of the Habitat conferences and look forward to ensuring Habitat III achieves productive, efficient, and effective outcomes.

In response to your questionnaire we provide the following information:

- 1) *What role will national and international human rights standards on the right to adequate housing play in informing your positions and proposals for Habitat III?*

The United States strongly believes in the importance of policies that promote access to housing in a fair manner. Furthermore, the United States has numerous laws, policies, and programs in place to protect against discrimination in housing and to promote access to housing in the United States. This includes, for example, the amended Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of dwellings, and in other housing-related transactions, based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability status. In addition to prohibiting discrimination, the federal government has multiple programs dedicated to addressing the affordability of housing. Many federal agencies across the U.S. government contribute to this work. For example, since the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness launched its Opening Doors Initiative, which is aimed at eradicating all types of homelessness in the United States, homelessness has declined 10 percent nationwide, including a 21 percent decrease in chronic homelessness; a 15 percent decline in homelessness among families; and a dramatic 33 percent drop in homelessness among veterans. Additionally, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides over \$33 million in rental assistance for low income residents annually. Overall, 5.4 million families receive assistance through HUD's rental programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also provides loan and rental assistance programs focused on low income rural communities.

The United States notes that it is not a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and we believe that discussions of human rights obligations and

commitments should accurately capture these rights as belonging to individuals or persons, and not to “groups,” and should accurately capture the scope of these rights.

- 2) *What public policies, programmes or plans are being considered or have been put forward by national or subnational level governments related to social cohesion and the right to adequate housing?*

The United States is committed to promoting access to adequate housing, and has worked to eliminate homelessness across our nation. In June 2009 the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and HUD joined together to establish the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an unprecedented interagency agreement formed to coordinate federal housing, transportation, and environmental investments; protect public health and the environment; promote equitable development; and help to address the challenges of climate change. Additionally, HUD recently released a new affirmatively furthering fair housing rule that provides tools and simplifies existing fair housing obligations so that cities and communities can more easily analyze and address patterns of integration and segregation, racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty, disproportionate housing needs, and disparities in access to opportunity. The United States strongly supports inclusive policies that reflect the concerns and needs of all individuals and members of minority groups, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, presence of children, and disability status. We believe these priorities are reflected in our policy approach to housing in the United States.

- 3) *In light of the fact that subnational and local governments play an essential role with respect to the implementation of the right to adequate housing, what plans and procedures does your government intend to implement to ensure they are engaged in the lead up to Habitat III as well as with respect to the implementation of commitments coming out of Habitat III?*

The United States acknowledges the critical role of local and subnational governments in promoting access to adequate housing, and promotes the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in responding to housing-related challenges. Earlier this year, the White House held listening sessions in Denver, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Hartford, Washington D.C., and Cleveland to learn from the experiences of stakeholders dealing with federal urban policy and housing policy at the local level. Over 700 people participated in these listening sessions, including representatives of state, local, and regional bodies, community development organizations, and other stakeholders. HUD also hosted several webcasts, which reached over 1,000 additional people. Furthermore, in the context of our federal government, local and subnational governments are responsible for many aspects of urban development, land use, municipal and regional planning, and the implementation of federal housing policies and programs. As a result, the federal government places a very high priority on meaningful engagement with local and subnational governments. Although these efforts are not related to the lead-up to Habitat III, they reflect the ongoing belief of the United States that an inclusive and broadly consultative approach is critical when responding to housing concerns.

HUD, in partnership with the U.S. Department of State and other federal agencies, is actively engaging with a wide range of civil society actors, and subnational and local governments, in a variety of fora. These include the domestic Habitat III regional gatherings around the country,

and the U.S. National Committee for Habitat III and its several subcommittees. The federal government also feeds input from a wide variety of civil society and state and local government actors into the U.S. National Report for Habitat III, which is used to inform a response to the Habitat III Secretariat in the development of the New Urban Agenda. The United States has championed broad and inclusive participation in preparation for and at Habitat III from the beginning, including through its remarks and positions at both PrepCom I and II, and through UNGA Second Committee resolutions on Habitat.

- 4) *What interesting or unique housing policies, programs or good practices consistent with the human right to housing does your Government intend to highlight through the Habitat II process? Please provide examples both from local, subnational or national levels of government, and if applicable from non-government actors as well.*

Specific policies that promote access to housing will be addressed in the forthcoming U.S. National Report for Habitat III. HUD is presently preparing for this report by synthesizing information from federal agencies and local and subnational governments, as well as non-governmental entities. The National Report Subcommittee for Habitat III will provide more information about local and non-governmental initiatives and approaches, and will be completed in Spring 2016. Currently, the U.S. National Report for Habitat III is focused on three themes: (1) Investing in People and Communities for Upward Mobility; (2) Securing Housing Options for All; and (3) Responding to Change and Building Resilience. An emphasis on social inclusion, poverty, and race; data and evidence-based policy; and the roles of civil society and philanthropic organizations will be mainstreamed across each of the themes.

- 5) *Please reflect on mechanisms used to monitor compliance with Habitat II at the national level and that have proven effective, and if possible, provide examples. What kind of mechanisms would your Government envisage as part of the monitoring and implementation of Habitat II?*

The United States completed a five-year update after Habitat II and released a report titled, “Progress, Trends, and Issues since Habitat II,” in which information was organized by each of the six areas of the Habitat II agenda.

The U.S. National Report for Habitat III will continue to discuss progress and new approaches, as well as data and evidence-driven policy initiatives and mechanisms developed since Habitat II.

Sincerely,



Keith M. Harper
Ambassador
U.S. Representative to the United Nations
Human Rights Council