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23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016

Ms Leilani Farha  
Special Rapporteur  
Office of the High Commissioner  
United Nations Human Rights  
Palais Des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10

Dear Ms Farha,

Reference is made to your correspondence dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015 regarding the Questionnaire in the context of the report to the Human Rights Council, 31<sup>st</sup> Session in March 2016 which will focus on the issue of homelessness and the enjoyment of the rights to adequate housing.

Please find attached the completed questionnaire for the Commonwealth of Dominica.

We regret the delay in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

**JANET CHARLES  
ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER**



COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES, FAMILY AND GENDER AFFAIRS

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**November 23, 2015**

**RESPONSES TO UN QUESTIONNAIRE ON HOMELESSNESS**

**1. Definition of homelessness:**

The Government of Dominica has not adopted a clear definition of homelessness. This being the case homelessness is not formerly referred to in laws, policies or programmes. Based on prevailing situation of homelessness in Dominica, a definition can be examined in three main contexts. In the first place there are individuals who are living on a daily basis on the streets particularly in the city. Those individuals are referred to as "vagrants" by virtue of the fact that they wander about with no place to call their home. They are in fact, regarded as "homeless". Government, in partnership with other stakeholders is as a matter of urgency, addressing this situation of homelessness through the development of clear policy guidelines.

In another context, certain individuals without a home are housed in an institution named "Grotto Home for the Homeless" which as the name connotes, provides shelter for persons of varying backgrounds who come from different parts of the country.

In the third context a few individuals in different communities are homeless since they do not have a place of abode and therefore find shelter on a nightly basis in any abandoned building.

**2. Measuring Homelessness:**

There is no clear measuring yardstick. Homelessness is however perceived by closely monitoring persons seen regularly sleeping on the streets and/or those who occupy derelict buildings which do not belong to them. In addition, persons do visit the Social Welfare Division and from their own admission indicate that they are homeless. Further, there are individuals who request admission to the Grotto Home for the Homeless on the basis that they do not have a home.

There is no data on homelessness in Dominica.

**3. Population groups most affected by homelessness:**

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In light of the fact that no data is compiled a factual account of groups affected is unavailable. Certain experiences are documented by the Social Welfare Division, private stakeholder institutions including the "Grotto Home for the Homeless" and "Child Fund Caribbean".

No formal studies exist. The Ministry of Health has undertaken an exercise to study and document the extent of homeless persons on the streets of the city with a view to develop appropriate actions.

#### **4. Primary Systemic and Structural Causes:**

Causes of homelessness in Dominica are varied. In the first place because of the poverty stricken state of certain individuals, they are unable to provide themselves with a home. Drug addiction has resulted in families evicting persons from their homes. Some persons choose to stay on the streets by their own volition. There are those who owned homes in the past but can no longer afford repairs thus leaving them to fall apart.

Government's policy includes a housing programme which targets persons of poor socio-economic backgrounds. Building material is provided for home repairs and new structures are also erected in some instances. Institutions like the "Grotto Home for the Homeless" provide shelter although there are limitations in terms of space.

#### **5. Discrimination and Stigmatization:**

There is little evidence to indicate discrimination. On the matter of stigmatization, individuals are in fact stigmatized particularly those referred to as "vagrants".

As indicated above, no laws or clear policies exist which could be used to remove homeless persons from public places or to prohibit certain activities in public places. The policies which are to be developed on homelessness will no doubt address the mentioned areas.

#### **6. Homelessness as a Human Rights Violation:**

The laws of Dominica do not address homelessness. The matter of vagrancy is, however mentioned in the laws of Dominica but only makes reference to a person who being able wholly or in part to maintain himself by work or by other means and willfully refusing or neglecting to do so shall be deemed an idle and disorderly person. Such definition does not in any way qualify a homeless person who is often referred to as a vagrant.

#### **7. Legal or Administrative Procedures:**

There are not any legal or administrative procedures available to challenge actions or inaction by government or private actors on the grounds that they lead to or fail to address homelessness.

#### **8. Strategies in place to reduce or eliminate homelessness.**

In relation to strategies, the Government of Dominica has through the initiative of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skeritt, implemented the "Housing Revolution Programme". This programme is aimed at renovating homes for persons, mainly the elderly and other persons whose socio-economic condition

does not allow them to own a home or even to effect repairs to their houses. New houses are constructed on behalf of families who are indigent.

The Programme which is supported by friendly government overseas has in a significant way change livelihoods since many persons were living in inhumane conditions.

Persons access the Programme with requests through their Parliamentary Representatives and also by applications to the Housing Division and the Social Welfare Division. Assessments are undertaken to determine eligibility.

As indicated above there is no legislation in place to address the matter of homelessness. As earlier mentioned however, there is an urgent need to effect policies on the matter of homelessness particularly in relation to persons on the streets. The Ministry of Health is actively pursuing this matter.



Leroy Morvan  
Chief Welfare Officer (Ag)