

DISPLACED IN FLORIDA

A SUBMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

Highlighting the cyclical displacement and failure of resettlement policies impacting Black and immigrant communities in Florida

MARCH 30, 2024



Joint Submission by the Family Action Network Movement,
Miami Workers Center, Faith in Florida, and Community Justice Project
to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing

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I. Reporting Organizations

[Miami Workers Center](#): A community organization that builds power with working-class tenants, workers, women, and families in Miami-Dade County.

[The Family Action Network Movement](#) (FANM): A membership-based non-profit organization that empowers low-income immigrants living in Miami-Dade County by providing wrap-around social services.

[Faith in Florida](#): A multicultural, nonpartisan network of congregation community organizations in Florida addressing systemic racial and economic issues that cause poverty for families.

[Community Justice Project](#): A movement lawyering practice supporting grassroots groups organizing for racial justice and human rights in South Florida.

I. Issue Summary

In an age of increased displacement by speculative development, climate change, and conflict, human rights defenders are fighting to ensure the resettlement for their communities is rooted in an accountable, human rights framework. To understand the present-day problem of increased displacement in the State of Florida within the United States, one must understand the pattern of double displacement that marginalized communities, particularly Black and immigrant communities, have endured throughout Florida's history.

Double displacement is a term utilized in different contexts to describe an individual being forcibly displaced by at least two external forces within their lifetime.^{1 2} This submission adopts the Double Displacement Project's definition of displacement³, which reflects the lived experience of those in Florida who have first been displaced from their place of origin, whether

¹ Miller et.al, "[Double Displacement-Interactions between resettlement, environmental change and migration](#)," GeoForum, Issue no. 129 (2022).

² Sevinin, et.al, "[Double Displacement of Refugees in the context of the 2023 Turkey-Syria Earthquake](#)," International Migration, Issue no. 61, (2023).

³ Claudia, Lopez "[Double Displacement Project](#)," (2017).

that be a home, country, or cultural enclave. Then, after resettling, they are displaced yet again by urban development projects, rising housing prices, and the action or inaction of local governments or other entities. In Florida, this double displacement is particularly acute in two contexts: 1) historically Black communities and 2) Black immigrant communities who were first displaced from their country of origin, resettled in Florida, and then displaced again.

The prioritization of real estate development and those profiting from it has led to a never-ending cycle of displacing marginalized communities in Florida. In 2024, evictions and redevelopment are the primary legal and policy tools utilized to displace Black and brown low-income tenants for rapid development. A lack of resettlement policies and a prohibition on local laws to protect renters empowers landowners to displace renters, small businesses, and mobile home owners. These actions violate various international law standards such as the right to not be arbitrarily deprived of property⁴ and the right to adequate housing.⁵

It is within this socio-cultural context that this present document answers questions 11, 1, and 10 from the Special Rapporteur's Resettlement as a Human Rights Issue Questionnaire. This present document will focus on trends in Miami-Dade County (MDC) and St. Petersburg, Florida that are emblematic of displacement and resettlement trends state-wide.

III. Question 11⁶

In Florida, Black, immigrant, low-income communities are most at risk of experiencing displacement, requiring resettlement, and being vulnerable to negative resettlement outcomes. Within this group, women, children, and elders are at heightened risk.

In MDC, low-income tenants are most likely to be displaced by eviction.⁷ It is important to note that many low-income tenants in MDC are individuals displaced from the Caribbean. Florida is home to 1.6 million Caribbean immigrants (representing 41% of the Caribbean immigrant population in the United States)⁸ and MDC is home to 864,800 Caribbean immigrants (the highest share of all US counties).⁹ Approximately 15% of Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. are living in poverty.¹⁰ Within this group of low-income tenants, Black tenants are most

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 17).

⁵ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 25), International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (article 11).

⁶ Question 11 from the Special Rapporteur's Resettlement as a Human Rights Issue Questionnaire: Is there any group particularly at risk of resettlement or particularly vulnerable to negative resettlement outcomes in your country or in the experience of your organization or company?

⁷ Power U Center for Social Change, "[State of Miami Renters](#)," (2012).

⁸ Lorenzi, et. al, "[Caribbean Immigrants in the United States](#)," Migration Policy Institute, (2022).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

negatively impacted, which unfortunately also mirrors national trends.¹¹ Census tracts with a larger share of Black households in MDC are more likely to experience higher rates of eviction.¹² In St. Petersburg, historically Black communities are more likely to be developed, and therefore, long-term Black residents are most likely to be displaced.¹³ Women and children are also more likely to be impacted by evictions in Florida.¹⁴ Immigrants are also heavily impacted by evictions in Florida.¹⁵ Migrant farm workers, plant nursery workers, domestic workers and others in largely undocumented immigrant communities face severe threats to their housing security.¹⁶ Moreover, the neighborhoods that are being rapidly gentrified and developed in MDC are primarily immigrant neighborhoods such as Little Haiti and Hialeah.^{17 18 19} Long-term Hialeah resident Mercedes Cabrera shares the pain and frustrations of being displaced by rapid gentrification in Hialeah:²⁰

“We’ve known Hialeah for the entirety of our lives. I’m nearly 40, and my mom, since she arrived in the Mariel Boatlift, she’s been in Hialeah. We were forced out of our own city where we grew up, where we nourished our roots, where we have so many contacts and so many people who want us back. But there’s only so much we can do with the rent prices and the fact that we’re dependent on a Section 8 voucher to help us find assistance.”

These evictions don’t only result in the loss of a home, but in damaging health disparities.²¹ Displacement has also been shown to negatively impact childrens’ learning

¹¹ According to [New America](#), Black renters comprise 18.6 percent of America’s renter population, yet they make up 51.1 percent of those affected by an eviction filing and 43.4 percent of those evicted nationally. Within this demographic, Black women with children are the most vulnerable of being evicted, comprising 28.3 percent of the average annual rate for eviction filings.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Leibson, et.al, “[Are real estate investors pushing out St. Petersburg’s Black residents?](#),” Tampa Bay Times (2024).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ This also mirrors national trends in the United States. [One third of immigrants](#) in the United States are low-income and [49% of immigrant headed households](#) in the United States are renters (as opposed to 33% of non-immigrant headed households). Furthermore, in the United States there are more eviction proceedings in neighborhoods with [large immigrant populations and the presence of Black immigrants](#) in a neighborhood is the strongest indicator of high eviction rates in a neighborhood.

¹⁶ [A study](#) by the Institute for Policy Studies’ Black Worker Initiative, in partnership with the National Domestic Workers Alliance’s We Dream in Black program found that 90% of respondents from MDC’s Black domestic workers were “at risk of eviction or having their utilities shut off in the next three months. Among undocumented workers, 94% report being at risk as compared to 85% of documented workers.

¹⁷ Chery, et.al, “[Little Haiti Residents Fear Losing ‘Their Home Away From Home,’](#)” New York Times (2023).

¹⁸ Joshua Ceballos, “[‘Beyond a Crisis:’ As Hialeah Gets More Popular, Residents Feel Pushed out by Rents,](#)” WLRN South Florida (2023).

¹⁹ Brito, et.al, “[How a Migrant Influx is Causing Tensions in One of the Most Hispanic Cities in the U.S.,](#)” Miami Herald (2024). “Three-quarters of its residents have roots in Cuba, and 95% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, making Hialeah one of the cities with the highest concentrations of Hispanic residents in the country.”

²⁰ Joshua Ceballos, “[Beyond a Crisis: As Hialeah Gets More Popular, Residents Feel Pushed Out By Rents](#)” WLRN (2023).

²¹ Displacement by eviction often leads to moving into poor quality housing, overcrowding, and homelessness. Displacement by eviction also leads to a [myriad of health issues for children](#): low birth weights, premature births,

outcomes, limit access to good healthcare, disrupt social networks that foster stability and community, and make it more difficult to access culturally relevant goods and services.²²

IV. Question 1²³

A. Conflict

Florida intakes a large number of displaced refugees and migrants from countries facing economic, environmental, and governance disasters.^{24 25 26} Even if a migrant/refugee makes it past Florida's militarized border and into the U.S., they are often displaced once again (either to jail, outside of the U.S. through deportation, or to another state) by Florida's hostile anti-immigrant laws. Florida has recently enacted a multitude of anti-immigrant laws.^{27 28} As a result of these laws, many immigrants (both documented and undocumented) have stopped driving in Florida, moved to other states, or stopped getting essential medical checkups.²⁹ Federal policies also displace refugees/migrants in Florida. In 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees called on all governments to end deportation flights to Haiti due to the violence there, however, the United States continues to operate Haiti deportation flights.³⁰ 49% of Haitian migrants in the United States live in Florida.³¹

poor cognitive development, infant mortality, heightened food insecurity, and toxic stress which makes a child more likely to contract common childhood diseases and develop diabetes or heart disease in adulthood.

²² Page, et. al, "[Potential Environmental and Social Costs of the Magic City Innovation District](#)," Earth Economics (2019).

²³ Question 1 from the Special Rapporteur's Resettlement as a Human Rights Issue Questionnaire: Please indicate and explain the laws and regulations applicable to resettlement in your country, organization or company, including in the context of development projects; infrastructure projects, mining, oil and gas exploitation, industrial projects; urban renewal projects; for disaster prevention; nature conservation and environmental protection; activities to promote tourism, sports or protect cultural heritage; or climate-, disaster- or hazard-induced environmental degradation or to prevent, mitigate or respond to conflict and any form of large scale violence. Please provide copies or links to the text of such policies, laws and regulations currently in force, or any significant draft proposals. In addition, kindly provide any assessment on the implementation and impact of these policies, laws and regulations and their outcomes for the rights of affected individuals and communities.

²⁴ Delaney Brown, "[Six Florida Cities Rank in Top 100 for Refugee Resettlement](#)," WUSF NPR, (2020).

²⁵ Drew Dixon, "[Florida has Handled nearly 300,000 Puerto Rican Refugees Since Hurricane Maria](#)," The Florida Times Union (2018).

²⁶ Jens Manuel Krogstad, "[Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S.](#)" Pew Research Center (2019).

²⁷ SB 1718 which makes knowingly and willfully transporting an undocumented immigrant in your car a third-degree felony, HB 1451 which prohibits state and local governments from recognizing non-official ID cards that are provided to individuals lacking an official ID (these are often provided to homeless individuals and undocumented citizens), and SB 1718 which imposes harsh penalties on employers who hire undocumented citizens and requires hospitals to collect and submit data on the cost of providing healthcare to undocumented citizens.

²⁸ While this submission is being written, Governor DeSantis is currently considering convening a [special legislative session](#) to enact legislation that would allow local police departments to stop and interrogate anyone they believe is an undocumented immigrant in Florida.

²⁹ Gisela Salomon, "Uncertain and Afraid: Florida's Immigrants Grapple With a Disrupted Reality Under New Law," AP News (2023).

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, "[U.S./Haiti: Suspend Deportation Flights to Haiti](#)," (2023).

³¹ Dain, et. al, "[Haitian Immigrants in the United States](#)," Migration Policy Institute (2023).

B. Development

1. *State Laws Preempting Locally Adopted Protections*

Florida law has increasingly been written to prohibit local governments from preventing evictions and meaningfully addressing resettlement. Most recently, the legislature banned sleeping outdoors in an effort to push cities towards criminalization of the unhoused.³²

Last year, Florida passed a law banning local tenants' rights ordinances³³ and passed another law banning rent control in the midst of an unprecedented rent crisis.³⁴ The same law creates obstacles to residents and local governments negotiating community benefit agreements and requiring resettlement terms, such as inclusionary zoning or set asides in new developments for displaced residents.

2. *Mobile Home Displacement*

Rent has consistently been rising for mobile home parks, and the populations living in these parks are especially vulnerable to the impacts of displacement. In a survey of mobile home park residents in six mobile home parks in MDC, 50% of residents said if their mobile home park was closed, they would be homeless and have nowhere else to relocate.³⁵ Upon closure, compensation for loss of these homes owned by residents is dictated by state law and woefully low, representing just a fraction of the value of the home and not even enough to put a deposit on a rental apartment.³⁶ The elimination of mobile home parks is the elimination of one of the only remaining sources of affordable housing.³⁷

The displacement of mobile home park residents has been constant throughout MDC's history, and its current manifestation is at the Soar mobile home park. Developers hope to transform the 22 acre trailer park into 3,990 multi-family units, 250,000 square feet of retail, 107,800 square feet of offices, and 312 hotel rooms.³⁸ The developer's application to the county for this proposal indicated that mobile home residents would be relocated in two different phases,

³² Gabbat, et.al, "[DeSantis Bans Florida's Unhoused People from Sleeping in Parks](#)," The Guardian (2024).

³³ Florida House Bill 1417 (2023)

³⁴ Florida Senate Bill 102 (2023)

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Fl. Statutes Ch. 723.0612(7) "a mobile home owner may abandon the mobile home in the mobile home park and collect \$1,375 for a single section and \$2,750 for a multisection"

³⁷ Chuck Elsesser, "[Preservation Strategies for Mobile Home Parks: Lessons from Miami-Dade County](#)," Florida Housing Coalition.

³⁸ Francisco Alvarado, "[Massive Mixed Use Project Pitched for Miami-Dade Mobile Home Park](#)," The Real Deal-Real Estate News (2023).

but offered no more details beyond this.³⁹ Multiple Soar park residents were residents who were displaced from the development of a prior mobile home community called Little Farm.⁴⁰

Luis Vendel, a tenant leader of the homeowners association at Soar park, speaks about how he has experienced threats from management to leave the mobile home park ever since news of the development taking over Soar park became public:

“From then on, they began to threaten a lot of people, according to [management] [it was] because they had a lot of [code] violations in the trailers, and [they] started giving eviction notices to a lot of residents. We have been threatened that they are going to raise apartments in this area. We don’t feel as if we are being regarded as human, but as objects instead. We feel relegated.”

Throughout MDC’s history of mobile home park displacements, there have never been systemic resettlement policies. Instead, local politicians have worked with individual families that were displaced to award them rental subsidies if they were able to find a new place to live or provide relocation fees for a few individual families.⁴¹

3. *Development of Little Haiti*

After the 2008 financial crisis, owner-occupied homes in Little Haiti were bought out in rapid succession by corporations and speculators.⁴² Developers began to assemble large swaths of land by emptying mobile home parks of longtime residents and evicting small businesses, many of which served as irreplaceable cultural anchors and community hubs. These same developers fought to “rebrand” the area and erase the name of Little Haiti, an effort Little Haiti’s leaders and organizations like FANM have prevented. The total upfront cost to a single household displaced from Little Haiti amounts to more than \$5,200; after the initial year of moving, the estimated ongoing annual costs incurred is more than \$2,500.⁴³ The additional annual cost of living in more remote, climate vulnerable areas accounts for 10 percent of displaced households’ annual income.⁴⁴ This cycle of displacement and attempted cultural erasure is not the inevitable result of unseen market forces. It is the result of layers of calculated federal, state, and local policy that puts profits over people.⁴⁵

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Supra at footnote 25.

⁴¹ [“How a Black Miami Neighborhood Became ‘Ground Zero for Climate Gentrification,’”](#) The Guardian (2024).

⁴² Andres Viglucci, [“Little Haiti is Up for Grabs. Will Gentrification Trample its People and Culture?”](#) The Miami Herald (2019).

⁴³ Supra at footnote 14.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ Federal laws that offered to zero out tax liability for those that bought up properties in neighborhoods like Little Haiti through so-called “Opportunity Zones,” state laws that banned local regulation of mobile home parks or tenant rights, abolition of rent control laws, and local policies that allow developers to rezone large swaths of land without

4. *Loss of Public Housing-Liberty Square Development*

In 2015, Related Group (a real-estate developer in Miami) announced a \$74 million development project for the historically Black neighborhood in Liberty Square.⁴⁶ Related Group planned to tear down the Liberty Square public housing project and build 1,900 new apartments.⁴⁷ The developers promised not to displace any residents. However, by 2021, only 200 of the nearly 600 original families had been relocated to new units, most of the completed units were leased to newcomers paying market-based rents, and the new units for relocated families faced a myriad of structural problems leading to flooding and mold, among other problems.⁴⁸ Related Group is emblematic of how local government leaders prioritize real estate, a major source of property taxes that funds its operations, over its constituents.

5. *Tropicana Field Development*

Tropicana Field, home to the Tampa Bay Rays baseball team, is located in St. Petersburg, Florida. The field was built over a historically Black neighborhood known as the Gas Plant District (named after the two fuel tanks that rose over the neighborhood). In the 1970's, the City of St. Petersburg utilized eminent domain to seize land from its longstanding Black residents under the guise of a community redevelopment project funded by \$11.3 million dollars in federal community redevelopment grants.⁴⁹ However, the promised redevelopment for the Black neighborhood never happened. Instead, Tropicana Field was built; more than 280 buildings had been demolished, more than 30 businesses closed, at least three former Black cemeteries that possibly had still had graves underneath were paved over, and more than 500 families had been displaced. In 2023, city officials announced a plan to sell the 86 acres that made up the Gas Plant District as part of a preliminary deal to build a new stadium to replace Tropicana Field. The pain, anger, and confusion this announcement elicited from community members living in the former Gas Plant District is captured in this quote from community member Alexa Manning, who was displaced by the first redevelopment project in the Gas Plant District:

“I was in my teens when the neighborhood was destroyed. “I know people were promised money by the city to relocate. How much of that happened, I’m not sure. They were caught in their weakest moment. I think what they started at the Gas Plant was just the beginning. It is all designed just to fall like dominoes, that we were always going to be pushed. They started pushing us out

including a single unit of affordable housing are just some of those building blocks at play in Little Haiti and across Florida.

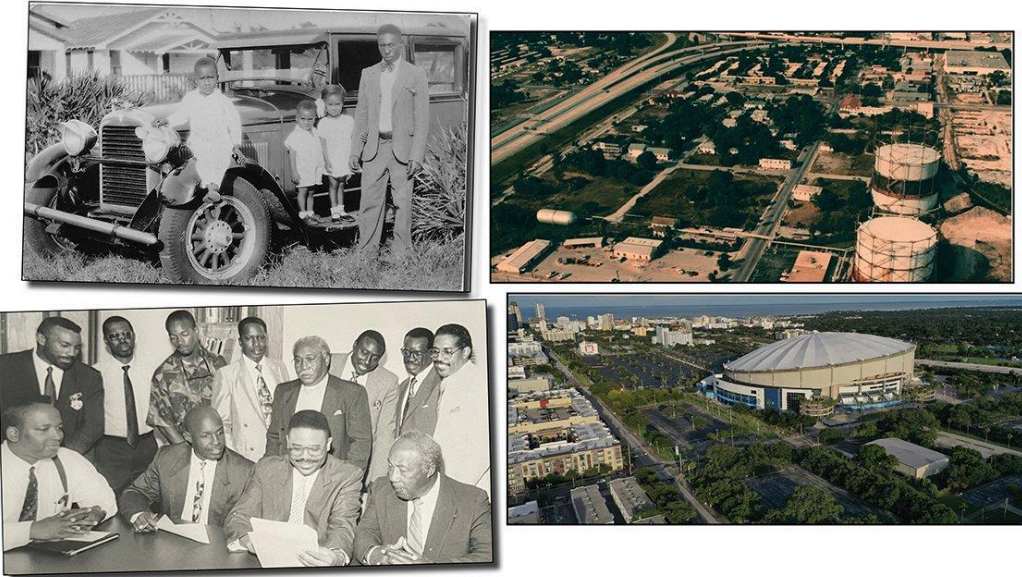
⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Esther Schrader, [“Florida Activists Oppose Redevelopment Plan That Would Displace Residents Again,”](#) Southern Poverty Law Center (2024).

then, and I think they haven't stopped pushing us out yet. I [cannot] understand how this [is] happening again. We have lived in this city our whole lives. We are teachers. We are counselors. We are people who give back to this city, and to me this is like a slap in the face. You have not put one cent into our communities and now you're just taking again? I need to understand why we are still not a part of this city. You are building everything around us, but not for us."



On the top and bottom left, images of Gas Plant community members before redevelopment of the area. On the top-right, an aerial image of the Gas Plant neighborhood before redevelopment. On the bottom right, an aerial image of the Gas Plant neighborhood after redevelopment and the building of Tropicana Field Stadium.

The controversy with Tropicana Field is representative of systemic issues with developers in the Tampa Bay area. A Tampa Bay Times analysis found that large companies in the Tampa Bay Area tend to focus on buying property clustered in St. Petersburg's historically Black neighborhoods.⁵⁰ These properties are often undervalued and lead to the biggest investment pay off for developers.⁵¹ The result of this is that St. Petersburg's Black population is shrinking. African Americans are the only racial and ethnic group in St. Petersburg that has had a net population loss over the last decade, and the city lost 10% of its Black residents between 2018-2022.⁵²

⁵⁰ Supra at footnote 14.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² Urban Market Analytics, "[New Census Data Show St. Petersburg's Black Population Shrinking as African Americans Leave in Record Numbers](#)," (2023).

B. Climate Gentrification

Little Haiti, a neighborhood in Miami that a surge of Haitian immigrants settled in after experiencing political turmoil in Haiti, is suffering from the impacts of climate gentrification. As climate change threatens communities, properties become more or less valuable based on their capacity to accommodate conditions like sea level rise. Unlike many other affluent areas in the city of Miami, Little Haiti sits on some of the highest ground above sea level, making it naturally flood resistant.⁵³ As a result of this, Little Haiti has been one of Miami's fastest gentrifying neighborhoods—since 2016, home values in Little Haiti have increased by 19%.⁵⁴

VI. Question 10⁵⁵

The following legal reforms would need to be put in place to ensure that international human rights standards and national regulations are upheld before, during, and after resettlement:

- Right to Return and One for One replacement⁵⁶
- Centering immigration trends in analysis of housing stock⁵⁷
- Rent control
- Inclusionary zoning requiring developers to build affordable housing units for displaced residents within new developments
- Resident or nonprofit ownership of mobile home parks

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Santiago, "[Weathering the Storm: Climate Gentrification in Miami's Little Haiti](#)," University of Michigan (2020).

⁵⁵ Question 10 from the Special Rapporteur's Resettlement as a Human Rights Issue Questionnaire: What legal, institutional and/or practical legal arrangements have been put in place or would in your view need to be put in place to ensure that international human rights standards and national regulations are upheld before, during and after resettlement; that adequate compensation is provided to all affected, regardless of the level of security of tenure they enjoyed prior to the proposed resettlement; and that living conditions after resettlement comply in practice with international human rights law, national law and regulations or relevant court rulings?

⁵⁶ Inspired by diasporas and displaced communities across the globe, public housing residents from Miami led the charge to enshrine these rights in regulations for the redevelopment of public housing across the United States. Despite this victory, public housing residents continue to be displaced through formal and informal means as the number of public housing units continue to shrink. # Renters, mobile home owners, and the small businesses that make up the fabric of our communities are fighting for similar commitments to be enforced.

⁵⁷ For example, increased displacement from the Caribbean region means that Florida should have a higher stock of affordable housing available, as a majority of those displaced individuals will reside in Florida.