

New fact sheet from United Nations sets out international right to adequate housing

Many millions of people around the world live in housing that threatens their lives and their health – including an estimated 1.5 million households in “core housing need” across Canada. Adequate housing has been a key part of international human rights law since the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) in 1948 ([John Peters Humphreys](#), a Canadian law professor, was the principal drafter of that legal document). Yet housing rights are routinely violated throughout the world. The United Nation’s High Commission for Human Rights and UN Habitat (the UN agency responsible for housing and human settlements) have released a powerful new statement on the international right to adequate housing that is intended to guide governments, and non-governmental groups, on the international right to adequate housing. The full statement is posted [here](#). The introduction reads:

“International human rights law recognizes everyone’s right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing. Despite the central place of this right within the global legal system, well over a billion people are not adequately housed. Millions around the world live in life- or health-threatening conditions, in overcrowded slums and informal settlements, or in other conditions which do not uphold their human rights and their dignity. Further millions are forcibly evicted, or threatened with forced eviction, from their homes every year.”

“Adequate housing was recognized as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Other international human rights treaties have since recognized or referred to the right to adequate housing or some elements of it, such as the protection of one’s home and privacy.”

“The right to adequate housing is relevant to all States, as they have all ratified at least one international treaty referring to adequate housing and committed themselves to protecting the right to adequate housing through international declarations, plans of action or conference outcome documents. Several constitutions protect the right to adequate housing or outline the State’s general responsibility to ensure adequate housing and living conditions for all. Courts from various legal systems have also adjudicated cases related to its enjoyment, covering, for instance, forced evictions, tenant protection, discrimination in the housing sphere or access to basic housing-related services. Increased international attention has also been paid to the right to adequate housing, including by human rights treaty bodies, regional human rights mechanisms and the Commission on Human Rights (now replaced by the Human Rights Council), which created the mandate of “Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living” in 2000. These initiatives have helped to clarify the scope and content of the right to adequate housing.”

“This Fact Sheet starts by explaining what the right to adequate housing is, illustrates what it means for specific individuals and groups, and then elaborates upon States’ related obligations. It concludes with an overview of national, regional and international accountability and monitoring mechanisms.”

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