

#MAKETHESHIFT

FROM HOUSING AS A COMMODITY TO HOUSING AS HOME AND A HUMAN RIGHT

THE SHIFT



The Shift is a new worldwide movement to reclaim and realize the fundamental human right to housing – to move away from housing as a place to park excess capital, to housing as a place to live in dignity, to raise families and participate in community.

The Shift has been initiated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It brings together civil society, all levels of government, multilateral institutions, national human

rights institutions, academia, philanthropists, artists, the private sector, and grassroots movements, and represents the interests of the individuals, families, communities, slum dwellers, and neighbourhood associations who understand and live the deep connections between housing, home and well-being.

The Shift calls for a change in the way we think and interact with housing and home.

- The Shift sees housing as a human right not a commodity;
- The Shift affirms housing as a vehicle for equality, dignity and inclusive community, rather than for inequality and the concentration of wealth;
- The Shift rejects forced evictions and displacement especially where they occur without the exploration of alternatives, without consultation and without provision of adequate alternative housing as defined in international human rights law;
- The Shift understands homelessness as a systemic failure to effectively and fully implement the right to housing and rejects the criminalization of homelessness;
- The Shift affirms the social function of housing and land and supports the agency of individuals to hold governments accountable so that their right to housing can be realized.



The Shift calls for participatory human rights based housing strategies, that include ending homelessness, at local, national and global levels in accordance with international human rights obligations and the commitments articulated in Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda to ensure the right to adequate housing for all.

The Shift will unite, support and foster local, regional and global activities and initiatives that claim the right to housing.

BACKGROUND

Despite the direct and obvious link between the enjoyment of the right to housing, to life itself and to security, dignity and independence, the dominant discourse sees housing as a commodity, a method for investment and capital growth, something to be addressed through discretionary policies and markets. Housing as a social good and a human right has lost its currency, devalued by a focus on housing a vehicle through which to generate wealth for the already wealthy.

The financialization of housing has become a key driver of socio-economic inequality. For the wealthy, the financialization of housing has provided an opportunity to grow wealth through investment, speculation, the development of hedge cities; all of which have turned houses into high earning banks accounts for those who can afford to buy-in. The value of global residential real estate is USD 163-trillion, more than twice the value of the world's total GDP. Housing and commercial real estate have become the *commodity of choice*. Housing is at the centre of an historic structural transformation in global investment and the economies of the industrialized world.

**USD 163
TRILLION: VALUE
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At the same time, at the local level, the financialization of housing is resulting in socio-spatial segregation. The uncontrolled flow of international capital in housing by global investors prevents the development of local policies to manage housing in the public interest. Indeed, in many cases, Local Governments that are at the forefront of administering housing programs and policies are powerless with respect to the inflow of global investment funds into local properties. In this way, the housing crisis directly effects the power of local citizens to be active participants in their living spaces, weakening local democracy.



As a result of this pervasive paradigm, low income and increasingly middle-income households are being priced-out of neighbourhoods they have lived and worked in for years, substantially increasing the number of people living in over-crowded dwellings, informal settlements without secure tenure, shelters or on the street, homeless. People are excluded from planning processes and development of new housing. Homes sit empty, while homeless populations rise.

Rarely is the connection made between the commodification and financialization of housing and its egregious consequences for people across the world. The pervasiveness of the commodity paradigm has in some instances generated apathy: the idea of private homeownership as the key to economic security is unquestioned and homelessness, evictions, starkly inadequate housing conditions and other deprivations of the right to housing are considered social facts that can be addressed through piecemeal social programs. Little consideration is given to the structural and systemic causes of what is, truly, a global housing crisis.

This is an unsustainable path. It is increasingly understood that access to adequate, affordable housing for all is one

**ACCESS TO ADEQUATE, AFFORDABLE₂
HOUSING FOR ALL IS ONE OF THE
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the world's top challenges. A shift in how we understand and interact with housing is the only viable way forward. The groundwork has been laid. The right to adequate housing, the right to life and the rights to security and dignity are well established in international human rights law and in regional and domestic jurisprudence. The Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda commit States to ensuring access for all to adequate, affordable safe housing. A number of local governments, national human rights institutions, NGOs, academics, artists, funders and peoples' movements have, recognized the right to adequate housing as necessary for survival and are undertaking creative initiatives in this regard.

Despite its character as a global crisis, and despite these worldwide efforts, there is no vehicle through which connections can be made between these diverse actors and their initiatives and commitments, and there is no mechanism to bring other stakeholders – the real estate sector, private equity firms – into the fold.

The time is ripe for an innovative initiative; one that conveys and addresses the urgency and severity of the global housing crisis created by the prevalent commodity-paradigm; that attracts new actors and builds on the momentum of those already engaged; and one that reflects the reality that housing is everyone's issue, not to be left to the whims of markets.

It is for this reason that the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN, and United Cities and Local Governments launched The Shift at Habitat III Conference in Quito. In June 2017, the Special Rapporteur held the first strategic planning meeting for “The Shift” with key allies from both the Global North and South. The interest and support for the initiative has been overwhelmingly positive, and the current project aims to catalyze on that support and propel it forward.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Shift seeks to incite paradigmatic change, from the normalized recognition of housing as a commodity, to housing as a social good and a human right. To this end, The Shift has three goals.

GOAL 1: PROVIDE A PLATFORM TO UNITE AND AMPLIFY SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHT TO HOUSING.



The primary goal of The Shift is to create a global movement, which requires the establishment of a robust network of committed actors. Currently, there is no global initiative to coordinate and unite diverse actors who are concerned with the global housing crisis and recognize the human rights dimensions of housing. The Shift will fill this gap between international and local movements, leveraging a multiplicity of local, national and regional voices and actions through the legitimacy of the UN Special Rapporteur, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, and United Cities and Local Governments.

ACTIONS:

- a. **Continue and increase outreach to actors in a diverse range of sectors.** The Shift will identify governments, organizations and institutions, movements, networks, artists, academics, private sector actors, and others to connect with and to become potential partners and allies in The Shift. This element will emphasize direct and targeted conversations with potential Shifters, including with those in high profile positions who might carry The Shift's core message to larger audiences internationally.
- b. **Develop common language and messaging for all Shifters.** The Shift will develop core messaging, principles and language for the use of all engaged actors, to provide unity across existing movements and planned activities.

GOAL 2: CHANGE THE CONVERSATION.

The Shift will undertake a variety of activities to make the connection between housing and human rights with a view to changing conversations away from a focus on housing as a commodity toward housing as a human right. It will underline the urgency, scope and severity of the global housing crisis by raising awareness of fundamental character of housing to life, its grounding in international human rights law, and the obligations that governments and private actors have with respect to the implementation of the right to housing. Further it will generate and maintain a parallel narrative such that each conversation that refers to price, investment, the market, or housing as a commodity will be met with one of dignity, the necessity to life, global inequality and housing as a human right



ACTIONS:

- a. **Implement an innovative communication strategy.** Building a global movement requires the establishment of dual-pronged communication strategy. First, The Shift will focus on developing reliable and accessible communication channels between Shifters. Second, the Shift will develop and implement a strategy for disseminating the message that includes a social media strategy, the publishing of op-eds, media outreach, podcasts and virtual roundtables and question-and-answer sessions, and reporting of notable events. An emphasis will be placed on making the human rights approach accessible to everyone through concrete terms and examples. Each of these objectives will be furthered through the development of a smartphone app which will allow Shifters to engage with each other, report on important advances, and will provide accessible information on the right to housing around the world.
- b. **Organize new collaborative events and introducing The Shift into relevant existing events.** The Shift will mobilize around important dates that relate to the right to housing. These will

include hosting an event at the release of the Special Rapporteur's reports, and attending events such as World Cities Day, Habitat International Coalition's Days of Action, the Homeless Football Cup, World Habitat Day, International Human Rights Day, etc. The Shift will identify housing related events hosted by grassroots or local organizations and offer The Shift as a platform for conveying human rights based messages. It will outline the particularly severe consequences of failing to realize the right to housing for the respective populations, for example on International Women's Days, and the International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples.

- c. **Develop advocacy tools around unified messages.** At The Shift Strategic Planning Meeting in June 2017, those in attendance identified that there is a lack of understanding by key actors of what the human rights approach to housing entails and that this poses a barrier to stakeholders seeking to make The Shift. Therefore, a core activity will be to provide actor-specific guidance and tools regarding the requirements and obligations that attach to the right to housing. Who has a duty to whom? What does this mean? What's the timeline? These tools and guidelines may include: "Do and Do Not" checklists, actor-specific pledges, pacts or charters of conduct; and fact sheets in multiple languages.

GOAL 3: ENCOURAGE GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION.



A paradigm change requires that law and policy makers invest in and implement the new framework. The Shift ultimately seeks to engage all levels of government to uphold their obligations under international human rights law, the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda to ensure access for all to adequate, affordable housing by adopting a human rights approach to housing, and to related sectors. The Shift will continue to engage national and local governments to discuss and support their vital role in The Shift. Ultimately, the Shift seeks to encourage state action, including:

adopting the position that housing is a human right and establishing this in law; implementing national and sub-national housing strategies that are grounded in human rights and the right to housing; allocating funds and human-rights based budgets for realizing the right to housing; regulating housing markets based on human rights principles.

ACTIONS:

- a. **Engage directly with different levels of government.** The Shift will focus on having direct conversations with all levels of government, around the world, with a specific emphasis on local governments as they universally play a key role in housing. This outreach will be facilitated through the Special Rapporteur's work, connecting with the network of UCLG, and by equipping Shifters to reach out to their respective governments.
- b. **Engage in strategic litigation, amicus briefs and mass communication from Special Rapporteur.** Where the opportunity presents, The Shift will engage in litigation processes both domestically and through international and regional human rights systems. For example, on World Habitat Day, The Shift could organize on a global scale the filing of a petition to a UN human rights

body demonstrating the global occurrence of violations of the right to housing. The Special Rapporteur will also consider how her role might be used for more impact and to create greater shifts, for example by ramping up the communications procedure.

- c. ***Develop model housing strategies to provide clear standards regarding the implementation of the right to housing to meet SDG and NUA commitments.*** The Special Rapporteur will focus her next thematic report on human rights based housing strategies to help guide governments as they take action to meet their international commitments.
- d. ***Develop pledges or covenants for local and national governments to sign onto.*** The Shift will provide examples of Right to Housing pledges or covenants that can be adopted by local governments committed to addressing housing issues using human rights principles and standards.

STRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

The Shift is being led by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing in partnership with two strategic allies – the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Governments. A small Secretariat is required with three staff persons: a Coordinator, an Outreach specialist; and a new technologies specialist who will work out of the office of the Special Rapporteur. Resources are also required for: website development and maintenance, outreach activities, identity development, an annual international meeting to grow the momentum, as well as the collaborative activities described above. No formal governance structure is in place at the present time, though this is under consideration.

A preliminary budget of 200,000 USD is being sought.