

Resolution: End Homelessness in Canada

adopted by the Canadian Conference on Homelessness, May 20, 2005

WHEREAS the provision of and access to adequate housing is a fundamental human right according to paragraph 25(1) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reads as follows:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”;

WHEREAS in 1976 Canada signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a legally binding treaty, committing Canada to make progress on fully realizing all economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to adequate housing, as outlined in paragraph 11(1) of the Covenant:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right.”;

WHEREAS the enjoyment of other human rights, such as those to privacy, to respect for the home, to freedom of movement, to freedom from discrimination, to environmental health, to security of the person, to freedom of association, and to the equal protection and benefit of the law are indivisible from and indispensable to the realization of the right to adequate housing;

WHEREAS the measures required of State Parties to the Covenant arise out of paragraph 2(1) of the Covenant, which provides that State Parties undertake to take steps to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures;

WHEREAS the United Nations Committee has been highly critical of Canada’s failure to make progress in guaranteeing the right to adequate housing for all Canadians, in light of Canada’s relative affluence, a criticism made most recently in its concluding observations of December 10, 1998:

“The Committee is gravely concerned that such a wealthy country as Canada has allowed the problem of homelessness and inadequate housing to grow to such proportions that the mayors of Canada’s 10 largest cities have now declared homelessness a national disaster.”;

WHEREAS the United Nations Committee issued a specific recommendation that Canada implement a national strategy aimed at reducing homelessness and poverty, which reads in part:

“The Committee recommends that the federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency by reinstating or increasing, as the case may be, social housing programs for those in need, improving and properly enforcing anti-discrimination legislation in the field of housing, increasing shelter allowances and social assistance rates to realistic levels, providing adequate support services for persons with disabilities, improving protection of security of tenure for tenants and improving protection of affordable rental housing stock from conversion to other uses. The Committee urges the State Party to implement a national strategy for the reduction of homelessness and poverty.”;

WHEREAS Canada's wealth and national budget are more than adequate to ensure that every woman, child and man residing in Canada has secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing as part of a standard of living that will provide healthy, physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social development and a good quality of life;

WHEREAS Canada has historical and legal obligations to the First Nations People who have a unique and special relationship with the Crown and the people of Canada, as manifested in treaties and other historical documents;

AND WHEREAS achievement of improved housing conditions is best realized through co-operative partnerships of government and civil society and the meaningful involvement of local communities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that

1) we call on the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal levels of government, in cooperation with people who are homeless and poor, civil society institutions – including, but not limited to non-governmental organizations, charities, faith communities, women's organizations, people with disabilities, LGBTTTQ organizations, unions and racialized communities - and Aboriginal communities and organizations, to develop and agree to, as a matter of top priority (within six months) a national strategy to end homelessness with *specific* goals, targets and time frames including the adoption, by every municipality, with enabling legislation where required, a blueprint and implementation plan for the elimination of homelessness;

2) we call on the federal and provincial/territorial governments to provide the funding necessary to fully implement the national strategy and local, community-driven, community-based blueprints to end homelessness through a special funding package for (1) adequate housing, (2) adequate income support, and (3) adequate support services to implement the local blueprints; that a clear statement of responsibilities of different levels of government be defined (one that does not rely on joint funding); that an inter-governmental body be appointed to oversee compliance and progress toward the goals; and that this inter-governmental body have independence from the government of the day (such as the auditor's offices) and that it be given a mechanism through which affected constituencies can be heard, complaints considered and inter-governmental conflicts resolved;

3) we call on local, regional and national civil society institutions across the country to mobilize support for the local blueprints to end homelessness and to help ensure that spending is allocated to this top social priority by all levels of government;

4) we call on the business community, large and small and local and national corporations, and national corporate lobby organizations, to actively join in with civil society organizations and governments in a partnership that ensures highest priority is given to ending homelessness and that adequate resources are allocated as a matter of top priority;

5) we affirm that a dedicated national effort can end the mass homelessness now common throughout Canada within five years and that the few remaining shelters necessary for emergency use in our communities will be used for very short-term stays.

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