



## **Statement on World Homelessness Day**

UNANIMA International is a Coalition of 22 Communities of Women Religious and a new group of ‘Friends’, serving in 89 countries with 25,000 members.<sup>1</sup> For over 19 years our focus has been on Women, Children/Girls, Migrants and Refugees. These groups disproportionately comprise the homeless populations of our world, though they are often hidden statistically and otherwise overlooked. It is our mandate to ensure these groups can achieve a better quality of life through having their voices heard at the international level. This was exemplified most recently at the United Nations (UN) 59<sup>th</sup> Commission for Social Development where UNANIMA International presented research and advocated for the issue of Family Homelessness to be given the necessary concern and attention by Member States, Civil Society, and all political actors alike.

Our statement for this year’s World Homelessness Day comes just a few weeks after the 76<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly convened and discussed issues such as COVID-19, climate change, poverty, gender parity, and growing socioeconomic inequalities in our global community. Despite the call for greater inclusion of marginalized groups, many of the most vulnerable voices—particularly those from individuals and families experiencing homelessness or inadequate housing—continue to be overlooked. To truly achieve the 2030 Agenda and ensure “no one is left behind,” it is crucial that Member States center their efforts to address homelessness/displacement at the heart of their sustainable development strategies. Homelessness is not simply a byproduct of poverty, it is often a cause *and* a consequence of the many issues that Member States and Civil Society traditionally name in global dialogues.

UNANIMA International recognizes unsafe or forced living conditions as signs of invisible homelessness as clarified in our recent research publications.<sup>2</sup> Some of the more invisible drivers and conditions of homelessness include domestic violence, displacement due to man-made and climate change disasters,<sup>3</sup> human trafficking, housing/rental discrimination, and being “doubled-up.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the coronavirus pandemic is disproportionately affecting homeless and housing insecure families around the world. Women and families living in temporary accommodations are unable to meet their basic needs, and they comprise the fastest growing part of the homelessness population.<sup>5</sup>

Access to adequate quality and affordable housing is not only a human right,<sup>6</sup> it is also a necessary gateway to safety and dignity across three domains: 1) social, 2) physical, and 3) security.<sup>7</sup> Member States are reminded of their commitment to protections for children in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>8</sup> as well as all people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On World Homelessness Day, we compel our communities to consider how different manifestations of homelessness intersect with thematic and priority issues frequently brought up at the UN. We cannot sufficiently meet the targets of Sustainable Development Goals without properly working to end homelessness across the globe.

## **Recommendations**

### **UNANIMA International puts forth the following recommendations:**

- ❖ We refer to and reiterate all of the former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Leilani Farha's response, including suggestions for moratoriums on evictions, and consideration that the provision of adequate housing, "may require the implementation of extraordinary measures as appropriate in a state of emergency including using vacant and abandoned units and available short-term rentals."
- ❖ We call for the adoption of Human Rights-Based Approaches to development, supported by legislative and other measures for the direction of national and local projects and strategies.
- ❖ We encourage the adoption of the UN Expert Group definition of homelessness, and the inclusion of homelessness and informal settlement residents in census results (with disclosure of demographics, including family composition in statistics).
- ❖ We recommend the promotion of combined Housing First (HF) and Supported Housing models with Trauma informed support.
- ❖ We support the implementation of policies that reduce inequalities including, but not limited to, universal health care, labor rights, housing and social protection.
- ❖ We believe that vulnerable and affected populations must be included in the policy and planning surrounding disaster management, mitigation, adaption and impact reduction.
- ❖ We encourage the implementation of human rights-based migration policies which apply to whole families, and allow for human response to changes in resource access that may prompt international movement.
- ❖ We assert that all homeless services globally must adopt holistic, trauma-informed care.
- ❖ We call for specific consideration of homeless families as part of response plans relating to COVID-19, as well as all humanitarian response plans.
- ❖ We recommend immediate government-initiated increases in opportunities to further women's education that fit employment needs and demands.
- ❖ We call for ensuring technology access for homeless and low-income children and families for educational, informational, and support purposes.
- ❖ We reiterate the suggestions of Indigenous activists for halting development projects on and near Indigenous land to reduce the risk of virus spread in their communities, and for continued cross-sectoral efforts to combat climate change.
- ❖ We call for governments of all levels to obtain and maintain meaningful partnerships with civil society and organizations who are already addressing the needs of families and individuals affected by the crisis and who are systematically left behind.

## **Works Referenced**

1. See UNANIMA International website. <https://unanima-international.org/>
2. See, UNANIMA International. Family Homelessness Through the Lens of the United Nations 2030 Agenda; The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking New York, USA: UNANIMA International, February 2020; May 2021. <https://unanima-international.org/documents-resources/>
3. See, UNANIMA International. <https://unanima-international.org/2021/05/13/women-girls-homelessness-and-the-sdgs-in-indigenous-communities-unpfii-side-event/>
4. Doubling-up is when two or more adults or families residing in the same housing unit. Bush H, Shinn M. Families' Experiences of Doubling Up After Homelessness. Cityscape. 2017;19(3):331-356. PMID: 29326758; PMCID: PMC5760191.
5. Health care for homeless women. Committee Opinion No. 576. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Obstet Gynecol 2013;122:936-40. <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2013/10/health-care-for-homeless-women>
6. Article 25. UN General Assembly. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 10 December 1948, 217 A (III). <https://www.un.org/en/universaldeclaration-human-rights/>
7. United Nations Expert Group Meeting. "Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for All to Address Homelessness." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 22 - 24 May 2019. 5. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/10/summary-egm-final-9sep.pdf>
8. UN General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN General Assembly, United Nations, Treaty Series, 20 November 1989, vol. 1577, p. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>