



Millions in the United States lack access to affordable, adequate housing – UN



Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

9 November 2009 – An independent United Nations expert has warned that the United States is an increasingly expensive place to find housing, leaving many more people homeless at a time when the financial crisis is hitting hard across the country.

“Millions of people in the U.S. are spending high percentages of their income to make their monthly rent and mortgage payment, face foreclosure or eviction, and live in overcrowded and substandard conditions,” said Raquel Rolnik, the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, in a statement following her first official visit to the United States.

“The number of homeless continues to rise with increasing numbers of working families and individuals finding themselves on the streets. The economic crisis has exacerbated this situation.”

Ms. Rolnik traveled to the cities of Washington DC, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, as part of an 18-day fact-finding mission about the status of affordable and adequate housing in the US.

The Special Rapporteur met with senior Government officials at the local, state, and federal level, including at the Department of State and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). She also attended public town hall meetings in each city visited, and engaged in discussions with representatives of civil society and people experiencing homelessness.

In a statement, Ms. Rolnik said she was pleased to note that the new US Administration is thinking critically and broadly to confront and solve the affordable housing crisis in the country, reversing decades of budget cuts and proposing large additional budgetary resources to housing. But she noted that a wider range of permanent options for affordable housing, particularly for the most vulnerable, is required.

“Though a good goal, implementation of mixed income developments in many cases leads to displacement, discriminatory practices and a reduction of the stock of affordable and adequate housing for low-income households,” said Ms. Rolnik.

Ms. Rolnik stressed that in designing and implementing these options, affected residents and community members should be partners in the planning and decision making process, as required by international human rights norms.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948, states that, among other matters, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family”, including housing.

Ms. Rolnik, who serves in an independent and unpaid capacity, will present her official report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2010.

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