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UN human rights expert urges putting housing at core of post-disaster recovery



UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing Raquel Rolnik

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The United Nations independent expert on the right to housing today called for putting the right to adequate shelter at the core of reconstruction and recovery efforts in post-disaster situations, stressing the need to ensure that vulnerable groups do not suffer housing discrimination.

“While disaster response will not – and should not – replace development efforts, it provides an occasion to address the inequalities that were magnified and exacerbated by a disaster, and to contribute to efforts to progressively realize the right to adequate housing for all,” [said](#) Raquel Rolnik, the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing.

It is time to acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple forms of tenure that exist worldwide, and give protection to those with the most insecure tenure and property arrangements.

“Human rights do not stop when a disaster strikes – to the contrary, it is then that they matter most,” said Ms. Rolnik, presenting her [annual report](#) to the General Assembly’s third committee, which deals with social, humanitarian and cultural affairs.

She said the concept of ‘Building Back Better’ after a disaster should be interpreted exactly as it means – aspiring to address the often inadequate living conditions of communities affected by disasters and redressing inequalities.

“This should be the priority, rather than... focusing on the housing structures and the provision of ‘transitional housing/shelter.’

“It is evident that in many contexts marked by a lack of appropriate housing for all, ‘transitional’ shelter will never be transitional and in many cases will even undermine the efforts of permanent and progressive reconstruction and divert funds from what is needed most. This is something to bear in mind in the reconstruction and recovery efforts in Haiti today,” Ms. Rolnik added.

She noted that displaced renters and informal settlers are often excluded from housing restitution and reconstruction schemes, on the basis that they cannot show formal private ownership titles, adding that such groups are also more vulnerable to land grabbing and eviction.

“It is time to acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple forms of tenure that exist worldwide, and give protection to those with the most insecure tenure and property arrangements,” she said.

Property restitution and housing reconstruction have sometimes taken place at the expense of rebuilding and improving the broader social, political and economic conditions required to sustain recovery and return, she pointed out.

“Realizing the right to adequate housing is about ensuring basic services and infrastructure, upgrading settlements and strengthening communities, as much as it is about building housing,” she added.

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