

Statement by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Maimunah Mohd Sharif
2021 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
9 August 2021

On the occasion of the 2021 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, UN-Habitat joins the international community in stressing and reiterating that indigenous peoples' rights are human rights.

UN-Habitat respects, protects and fulfils the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples and in particular their human right to adequate housing as a component of an adequate standard of living, their right to be consulted and to be active participants in development, and supports states in their efforts to do the same.

The right to adequate housing for all is a binding commitment of States in international law. Despite this, indigenous people frequently face living and housing standards that fail to meet the fundamental requirements of the human right to adequate housing.

Indigenous persons are increasingly migrating to urban areas as part of the global dynamics of migration. Their migration is driven by the complex interplay of a range of factors. These include land dispossession, poverty, disasters, lack of employment opportunities, the deterioration of traditional livelihoods, and the prospect of opportunities in urban areas. In urban areas indigenous persons face additional challenges. These include common economic and social challenges such as limited access to services and adequate housing. They also include cultural challenges such as discrimination and a loss of language, identity and culture.

Urban indigenous peoples also experience homelessness and other severe violations of their right to adequate housing at a disproportionate rate compared to the non-indigenous population due to social, economic and cultural discriminations. Indigenous people are also more likely to live in overcrowded houses and dwelling that need major repairs. They are more likely to lack access to basic services and secure tenure over their houses and lands. This situation is exacerbated where

indigenous peoples face multiple marginalising factors, such as those who are women, children, youth and older persons or persons with disabilities.

Ending inequalities and ensuring access to adequate housing for indigenous peoples is a precondition to meet the pledge to leave no one behind and make progress in the realization of Agenda 2030. This requires consideration of their relationship to lands, territories and resources, cultural integrity, and their ability to determine and develop their own path toward development as provided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous peoples' right to adequate housing can only be realized through policies and measures that respect, protect and fulfil their right to free, prior and informed consent.

Such policies should be based on meaningful and effective consultation and participation of indigenous peoples at all stages and should reflect the needs and opportunities of different groups including indigenous women, youth and older persons among others. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency response have once again stressed the crucial importance of collecting disaggregated data and to fill the gap in understanding unequal access to rights and outcomes of public strategies and policies.

UN-Habitat has done and will continue to include and strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples in the programming and development of actions, policies and projects that may affect them and will actively monitor the impact of such projects on their rights.

In this time of crisis, as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the world cannot possibly build back better if indigenous peoples are left behind.