What is the Human Right to Housing?

Housing is recognized as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25). Governments have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill all human rights, many of which arise out of basic needs.

The Human Right to Housing is "more than a roof" because a home is not just a commodity or even merely shelter. A home is the very foundation of family stability, personal belonging and community. The Human Right to Housing is therefore the right to live in a decent home in peace and dignity, and to live in a society where housing is afforded to all on an equitable basis.

The right to housing is built on the foundation of basic human rights principles, such as universality, equity and participation. Governments are also obligated to meet the following seven conditions to ensure basic housing rights are met.

ACCESSIBILITY:

Steps must be taken to ensure those with special needs, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, and persons who are terminally ill or HIV-positive, have ready access to housing.

CULTURAL ADEQUACY:

Housing and housing policy must allow for the expression of cultural identity and diversity.

AFFORDABILITY:

Steps must be taken to ensure housing costs do not threaten financial capacity to meet other basic needs.

LOCATION:

Housing must be built away from polluted sites and other health and safety threats and in a location that provides access to jobs, healthcare, school and other

AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES:

Housing must ensure access to essential facilities and services, such as safe drinking water, electricity, heating, sanitation, and cooking and washing facilities.

SECURITY, PEACE & DIGNITY:

Every person must be able to occupy home free from harassment, forced eviction, and other threats of displacement.

SAFE & HABITABLE:

Housing must be safe, healthy, and habitable, including adequate space, privacy and protection from weather. disease and structural hazards.

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING

UNIVERSALITY:

The right to housing extends to everyone. Barriers and discrimination in access to basic and decent housing must be eliminated.

There must be equitable utilization of housing that ensures existing housing stock is used in a way to meet the needs of all people, rather than fuel profit through market speculation. Other available resources, such as government subsidies and tax breaks that apply to the costs of financing housing, must also be shared fairly.

PARTICIPATION:

Residents and communities must have democratic control of local resources in an equitable manner that is inclusive of all members of the community.

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What is the State of the Human Right to Housing in the United States?

In the United States we face not just a market failure in housing – or a "housing crisis" – but a profound human rights crisis with regard to housing, as reflected in the following eye-opening facts:

- While there are approximately 3.5 million homeless people in the United States, the number of vacant "people-less" homes has reached over 18.5 million
- The average time applicants have to dropwait before they receive rental assistance in the form of Section 8 vouchers or public housing is 4-6 years, which they will receive only if they can fulfill ever-narrowing eligibility requirements.
- While wealthy homeowner tax credits are entitlements that cost the U.S. government over \$150 billion, federal low-income housing program budgets combined equal roughly \$30 billion.
- Lenders filed a record 2.87 million foreclosures in 2010, a figure that is projected to increase by 20 percent in 2011. This translated into six to ten thousand foreclosures every day that year.

"Housing is not just a roof; it's not just walls. It's much more than that, and I know that housing has a sacred meaning attached to it. Territories are sacred. They are not only materials; they are spiritual, as well. So housing must have a community attached to it. A community and a territory - a territory where people can have access to the means of livelihood and not only be sheltered somewhere."

Raquel Rolnik, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing

Join the human right to housing movement that is growing across the country!

For more information, visit restorehousingrights.org