



Statement on World Homeless Day

UNANIMA International (UI) is a Coalition of 22 Communities of Women Religious and a new group of ‘Friends,’ serving in over 85 countries with 25,000 members.¹ For over 20 years our focus has been on Women, Children/Girls, Migrants and Refugees – people especially susceptible to homelessness since they are those most left behind. Our mission is to educate and influence policymakers at the global level. In solidarity, we work for systemic change to achieve a more just world. We envision a future where women and children who live in extreme poverty in our society will be empowered to achieve a better quality of life.

Often, the women and children that are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty, homelessness, and other traumatic experiences like human trafficking are those most susceptible to climate change and natural disasters. They are also often those most left behind and invisible in our societies. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in 2020 alone, 40.5 million internal displacements were new, and of those displacements, 30.7 million (76%) were triggered by weather-related disasters.² The connection between displacement and homelessness cannot be overstated – when people are uprooted from their homes due to tsunamis, earthquakes, storms, and even slower environmental changes like droughts, they have little choice but to enter into a precarious cycle of hidden homelessness. The testimonies shared with UNANIMA International from these at-risk climate zones, including Kenya, the Philippines, India, and others, point to the growing importance of cities and urban planning policies in the fight against climate change.³

Urban centers are projected to become more popular destinations for displaced people in the coming years, however, many cities are in hazard-prone locations too.⁴ Additionally, people migrating from rural to urban areas in developing countries often move directly into slums and/or housing that is inadequate because they lack alternative opportunities. We saw this firsthand in Mukuru, Kenya, where communities are separated from many of the benefits of development and infrastructure which benefits cities. For example, Akeyo, a single mother of five in an interview with UNANIMA International stated: “I wanted to move, but couldn’t afford it, I had no option but to live with the water in my house, waiting for the water to dry up... I have been living in the same place for 15 years now, and each year it is the case that it has flooded.”⁵ People experiencing hidden homelessness in the urban context find themselves in slums, in inadequate housing/shelters, and invisible to the local policymakers that ignore the informal settlements on the fringes of their cities. When a natural disaster or climate-induced event takes place, the people living in these informal settlements are the first to experience death/declines in health, be displaced once more, and have their families be split up.

While homelessness can be largely concentrated in cities, especially homelessness that is driven by climate-related factors, solutions to homelessness need to be both local and global. UN-Habitat estimates that over 20% of the world’s population lives in inadequate housing and that more than 100 million people have no housing at all.⁶ UNANIMA International and other members of Civil Society are determined to find solutions to this issue. Some of our most recent work concentrated on the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution ***“Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19),”*** which was passed unanimously by the UNGA on December 16th, 2021.⁷ This landmark resolution calls upon Member States to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights for people experiencing homelessness in numerous ways. The specific vulnerabilities of women, children, girls, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities are acknowledged within the text. The resolution is particularly special due to its built-in accountability mechanism: Member States are



required to share their disaggregated data and national statistics/demographics on homelessness every two years at the UN. This information will be invaluable to our work since we will have a better understanding of the manifestations of homelessness nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Grassroots testimonies from UI Executive Director Jean Quinn's trip to Brazil this year⁸ highlight the stark inequalities in cities and the consequences of the division between people living in informal settlements versus those with greater access to resources in cities. Behind every homelessness story we see humanity in the face of inequality. At UNANIMA International, we stick to the mantra "don't talk about us, without us." The path forward needs to include the voices of those that have experienced homelessness. It also needs to address harmful climate practices, discrimination, and housing policies that actively exclude and displace people. This World Homeless Day, and as we head toward COP27 in November, we strongly encourage all stakeholders to seriously consider the role that climate change plays in exacerbating global homelessness. We call for a paradigm shift where homelessness and the need for a healthy planet are finally viewed as the human rights issue they are.

Recommendations

UNANIMA International puts forth the following recommendations:

- 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 call for specific consideration of homeless families as part of response plans relating to COVID-19, as well as all humanitarian response plans as the pandemic is far from over (particularly in geographically isolated areas and countries with limited resources and capacity).
- We support efforts to reduce intergenerational cycles of inequality, poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination that predispose families to involuntary migration, homelessness, trafficking, domestic violence, and other unsafe situations.
- In the spirit of SDG 17, we encourage the formation and maintenance of strong multilateral and regional partnerships on homelessness, international development, climate-induced displacement, and other relevant issues that exacerbate growing inequalities among those most left behind.

References

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