

To: [Mayor, City Council/ County Council, County Exec.]

From: [Community organizations]

RE: Municipal housing and development policies violate international human rights standards

As you consider upcoming legislation and policy related to economic development and affordable housing, I write on behalf of residents who are working to promote human rights in our region to remind you that the affordable housing challenges in our region reflect an unprecedented *global housing crisis* that has direct links to the 2008 financial crisis.

This point is made very clearly in the text of a [letter written by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Housing, Leilani Farha, to the United States](#) and other governments earlier this year. An important conclusion in Farha's message is that the affordable housing crisis results from a particular set of policy decisions that have privileged elite interests while neglecting the basic needs of other constituencies. In her letter, she warns national leaders that **many of their regulatory, taxation, and housing policies contradict national obligations under international human rights treaties and standards.**

We provide Farha's letter here, and we hope you will consider this carefully in your policy planning and deliberation. As you know, state, county, and municipal leaders have an obligation to enforce U.S. international obligations and to protect internationally recognized human rights, including the right to housing.

[If your city is a human rights city:] As a "Human Rights City," our political leaders and community has expressed a commitment to human rights and the intention to provide leadership and advocacy to secure, protect, and promote human rights for all people. The human right to housing must be seen as a priority, and every effort must be made to prevent residents from being displaced.

To highlight some key points in Ms. Farha's letter, we note that she cites the following violations in her letter to the United States, and some of these relate directly to city policies:

- Financial supports and tax breaks that encourage the institutional investment in housing undermine government's responsibility under international law to ensure access to adequate housing for the most vulnerable populations.
- Failure to enact legislation to ensure adequate supplies of affordable housing, such as rent control and policies linking housing prices with minimum wage regulations.
- Disproportionately impacting African American households and other minority groups, contrary to the U.S. government's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Her letter goes on to conclude:

To address the issue of financialization and its impact on the enjoyment of the right to housing, your Government must develop policies and laws that include a full range of taxation, regulatory and planning measures in order to re-establish housing as a human right, promote an inclusive housing system, prevent speculation and limit the extraction

of profits at the expense of tenants. This will require a transformation of the relationship between your Government and the financial sector, whereby human rights implementation becomes the overriding goal.

We are eager to work with you to try to find approaches to development and planning so that we can better achieve these goals. We note too that we are working with policy makers and activists in a number of other cities across the country to encourage similar local responses to Farha's message. We want our city to be a model, leading the way to the development of urban policies that make our communities "most livable" for *every* resident. We should aspire to becoming a "most compassionate city" that takes care of its most vulnerable residents and ensures that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full human potential.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,