

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

From: Community organizations

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

We are writing to share with you 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 warning them that **many of their regulatory, taxation, and housing policies contradict national obligations under international human rights treaties and standards.**

The letter is provided here, and we hope you will consider this carefully in future decisions related to economic development and housing in our city and region. As you know, municipal leaders have an obligation to protect internationally recognized human rights, including the right to housing. To reinforce this, Pittsburgh's City Council passed a proclamation in April of 2011 declaring our city a "Human Rights City." This proclamation expressed a commitment to human rights and the intention to "provide leadership and advocacy to secure, protect, and promote human rights for all people."

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 Pittsburgh to be a model city 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,

[Pittsburgh and Allegheny county organizations are invited to sign this letter, which will be delivered to local officials]