

October 14, 2010

DPI/NGO Briefing

“Home at Last? The State of the Homeless
In Today’s Cities”

(In Observance of World Habitat Day - 4 October)

Thursday, October 7, 2010, 10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

1.0 Background Information:

Accurate figures on the global scale of homelessness are especially unavailable and underestimated, partly because it is difficult to pinpoint exact numbers of homeless people who have no address or contact information. The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) estimates that 1.1 billion people live in inadequate housing conditions in urbane areas alone, while an estimated 100 million people have no housing what so ever.

In the United States, on of the wealthier developed countries, according to a 2007 study by the U.S. National Law Center on Homelessness and poverty, found that some 3.5 million Americans experience each year. Children make up 23 percent of people experiencing homelessness in the United States and 42 percent of those children are under 5 years old.

In many cities of developing countries, more than half of the population live in informal settlements, without security of tenure and under conditions that can be described as life and health threatening. According to UN-HABITAT, India has lifted 59.7 million people out of their slum conditions since the year 2000. But slum dwellers still make up 28.1 percent of India’s population today. Although there is currently no global definition for homelessness and legal definitions vary from country to country, the element common to all homeless persons is a lack of a stable residence they can call home.

The UN-HABITAT publication “The State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide”, notes that in the past decade over 200 million people in the developing world have been lifted out of slum conditions. However, in the course of the same time frame, the number of people living in slums has increased by 6 million each year,

Based on these trends, this is the time to pay close attention to the issue of homelessness. Adequate housing is recognized by the United Nations as a basic human right. Right-based housing strategies have thus been developed urging governments to combat, reduce and eradicate homelessness. There is little doubt that the best way combat homelessness is to avoid people becoming homeless in the first place. This cannot happen if mass evictions continue to take place in cities alongside the development of expensive housing for the ever growing middle classes.

Homelessness is an issue that affects both developing countries and nations with advanced economies. As we commemorate World Habitat Day, we must consider how to bridge the urban divide to build better cities and a better life for all.

2.0 Moderator;

Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez; Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

3.0 Speakers;

Ms. Yamina Djacta; Deputy Director and Office -In-Charge of the New York Office of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT)

Dr. Carol Caton; Professor of Clinical Socio-Medical Sciences in Psychiatry at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University and a Research Scientist at the New York State Psychiatric Institute

3.0 Speakers (Cont'd)

Mr. Bill Motsavage; Vice President of Independent Living Services for Valley Youth House- an independent homeless shelter

Ms. Shareema Wright; A client of Valley Youth House "Supportive Housing for Homeless Families Program

Ms. Serena Copeland; Member of the Pennsylvania Youth advisory Board (YAB)

4.0 The Moderator, Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez, welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds. She spoke on the urgent needs of the homeless what the United Nations is doing to address the problem. The problem was there is currently no global initiative to solve this critical problem. She stated that this morning agenda will focus on the issue of the homeless'

5.0 The first speaker, Ms. Yamina Djacta, has been with UN-HABITAT since January, 1996. She previously served as the Coordinator of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit at UN-HABITAT Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. She has worked in the field of economic and social development for more than twenty years including at the United Nations. Ms. Djacta holds a Bachelors Degree in Economics and a Masters Degree in Business Administration.

Ms. Yamina Djacta spoke on the 2000 year report on homeless. She provided 5 definitions of a SLUM;

1. A structure that is not solid enough to withstand storms and winds
2. A crowded room, holding more than 3 persons
3. No access to clean water
4. No access to adequate sanitation
5. Not a secure tenant - that is defined by a contract so as not to be a victim of crime and violence.

She stated that slums are a deterrent to leading productive lives. Ms. Djacta stated that Habitat helps to mobilize governments with inclusive growth - with people -centered and environmentally sustainable, gender and age sensitive policies. Urban planning is very important because through it it is possible to upgrade all slums. She again stated that we need increased political will and resources in order to have sustainable development.

Although some progress has been made, a lot remains to be done. It is the right of everyone to have access to an adequate standard of living and housing. Countries in Africa are the least urbanized.. One percent of Africa's population currently live in slums. Villages in developing countries are subject to crime, etc.

6.0 The second speaker, Dr. Carol Caton, also serves as the Principal Investigator and Director of the Columbia Center for Homeless Prevention Studies (CHPS) , a mental health services center. They are focused on the development of interventions to prevent and end homelessness for single adults, families and youth with mental illness

Faculty from various departments and schools within Columbia University as well as other academic centers in the Northeast are involved in this multidisciplinary effort. Dr. Caton and her collaborators have published extensively on the outcome of schizophrenia, homelessness and the combination of severe mental illness and substance use.

Dr. Caton also serves on the research advisory boards of the National Alliance to end homelessness and the New York Department of Homeless Services. She was also involved in the 2004 Task Force for the Ten Year Plan to end Chronic Homelessness in New York City.

She indicated that there was an unprecedented rise in homelessness in developed countries, especially in urban areas. Employment opportunities for them are effected. We need to increase the availability of low cost housing, income, support and access especially for these vulnerable groups including homeless families, adults with mental illness and addiction disorders, and homeless youth. Dr. Caton stated that we must reach the "hard to reach". We also need to help them to adapt to the social, cultural and economic context of their new settings. Research is essential.

7.0 The third speaker, Mr. Bill Motsavage, indicated that Independent Living Services are programs developed to assist foster care and homeless youth to make a successful transition to becoming self-sufficient. He indicated that he supervises a variety of housing and out-client programs in Philadelphia and the Lehigh Valley areas in the state of Pennsylvania. For over twenty years he has worked with both homeless and foster care youth in Eastern Pennsylvania. He has also led the statewide Youth Advisory Board for older foster youth.

Mr. Motsavage indicated that studies show that 7 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 spend one or more nights on the street. Youth aging out of foster care are at the extreme risk of becoming homeless. Eighty percent of runaways or homeless girls are sexually and physically abused. Thirty-four percent of boys have been sexually abused before leaving home. Thirty-two percent of runaways and homeless attempt suicide.

His organization's first response are to provide housing based on the youth's needs. They also have to provide resources for them to become independent. This includes emergency food and child care. A hands on case management are the key. There must also be adequate supervision of the youth.

8.0 The fourth speaker, Ms. Shareema Wright, a native of Brooklyn moved eastern Pennsylvania when she was nine. She attended local schools until her junior year. Ms. Wright has four children and has worked at a variety of jobs but became homeless in December, 2009 when both she and her fiance became unemployed.

Pregnant and unable to find work she was housed by child welfare authorities in a series of hotels until she entered the Valley Youth Program.

She is now working to pass the General Educational Development (GED) test and is actively searching for employment. Her fiance is employed in the cleaning business. Her goal is to provide a stable life for her children.

9.0 The fifth speaker, Ms Serena Copeland, The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board is comprised of youth between the ages sixteen and twenty-one who have been ar are currently living in substitute or foster care. Ms. Copeland spent time in youth shelters at the age of 13 and again at the age of 16. She then became a ward of the court as an adolescent and resided in a variety of foster homes and residential placements.

Upon leaving the the child welfare system, Ms. Copeland experienced a form of homelessness known as "house hopping". This is residing in several unstable living situations. Ms. Copeland is also now a participant in the Valley Youth House Supportive Housing Program. This a program that provides apartments for homeless youth and youth who have transitioned out of the foster care system. She now attends college part time and maintains two jobs.

10. Questions/Answers:

10.1 Mr. Bill Motsavage; Grants are available in New York to provide care management services to these youth and up to \$5 K a year are also available for the youth who are homeless.

10. Questions/Answers (Cont'd) ;

10.2 Mr. Bill Motsavage; The problem is generally both out of sight and out of mind to these people.

10.3 Ms. Yamina Djacta; Local authorities are not always aware of their responsibilities to the homeless.

10.4 Dr. Carol Caton; We must address the exclusion of the homeless. This is very important to the solution.

10.5 Ms. Shareema Wright; We can all help by providing more help for the homeless.

10.6 Ms. Serena Copeland; To solve this problem we must find the right match for the homeless coming in. We cannot place anywhere.

10.7 Ms. Serena Copeland; She indicated that she was willing to help given her situation.

10.8 Dr. Carol Caton; She is working with twenty-one shelters across the country on this important issue.

10.9 Ms. Serena Copeland; One of the major problems are that when a child graduates from high school their family does not have any money to help the child.

10-10 Mr. Bill Motsavage; We should extend the child assistant age to age twenty-one. This would help greatly. In Philadelphia when they changed the age to twenty-one it was a big help.

10.11 Ms. Yamina Djacta; By seeing how agencies in Philadelphia can work with governments can help make the system work here. NGOs can help by working with Habitat for Humanity on this issue.

10.12 Dr. Carol Caton; People living on the streets are more addicted to drugs, etc. This issue must be addressed. Some programs do not like to take in people who are substance abusers.

10.13 Ms. Serena Copeland; She indicated that her case worker always asked about her family and her self.

10.14 Mr. Bill Motsavage; He indicated that his organization has set up and are now dealing with drug abuse problems.

10.15 Ms. Shareema Wright; She indicated that she is the mother of four children and her organization is dealing with all these issues.

10.16 Dr. Carol Caton; We need to do more on what as parents we do with the children of children.

10.17 Ms. Yamina Djacta; Lots of governments do have the capacity for these programs. One possibility is to create private sector jobs in the construction industry.

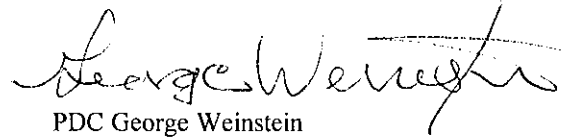
10.18 Dr. Carol Caton; To be able to address the homelessness, you must work this out at the local levels.

10.19 Mr. Bill Motsavage; Young adult shelters are now supervised 24/7.

10.20 Ms. Yamina Djacta; Governments must develop policies to address the homeless problem and make sure that they being developed and work properly.

10.21 Dr. Carol Caton; Her organization has prepared documents and is addressing the problems of homelessness.

0.22 Mr. Bill Mottsavage; The Philadelphia are now able to serve the undocumented homeless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Weinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

PDC George Weinstein
National UN Chairman