

Financial speculation led to unsustainable global housing crisis, UN expert says

2 March 2017 – The world's money markets have priced people out of cities, a United Nations independent expert has said, blaming financial markets and speculators for treating housing as a place to park capital.

Housing has lost its social function and is seen instead as a vehicle for wealth and asset growth. It has become a financial commodity, robbed of its connection to community, dignity and the idea of home, said Leilani Farha, the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing.

Her latest report, which Ms. Farha presented today to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, examines how housing has become a repository for global capital, and the impact that commodification has had on affordability of housing and homelessness.

The total value of the global housing market is a staggering \$163 trillion, the UN expert said, the equivalent of more than twice the world's total economy.

The financial world has essentially operated without any consideration of housing as a human right and States are complicit: they have supported financial markets in a way that has made housing unaffordable for most residents, Ms. Farha said.

Her report recommends stronger rights-based frameworks both domestically and internationally to address the problem. It suggests that States must regulate private actors not simply to prevent blatant violations of human rights but also to ensure that their actions are consistent with the obligation to realize housing as a human right for all.

In London, for instance, developers have not been scared off by the social housing requirement, Ms. Farha said in her statement, while in Vancouver, vacant homes face a one per cent tax levy which is intended to contribute to low-income accommodation.

This is an issue of accountability, she says. Government accountability to international human rights obligations has been replaced with accountability to markets and investors.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[UN envoy condemns firing of rocket from Gaza towards Israel](#)

2 March 2017 – Condemning a rocket fired from Gaza towards Israel, a senior United Nations envoy has called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation of the situation.

“Such provocations seek only to undermine peace,” said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in a statement today.

According to the statement, the rocket fired yesterday was third such incident in the past 30 days after a period of almost four months of quiet.

“I call on all responsible parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of Palestinians and Israelis,” urged Mr. Mladenov.

[Civilian casualty figure in Iraq tops 1,000 – UN reports](#)

2 March 2017 –

More than 1,000 civilians were killed or injured last month in Iraq, the United Nations mission in the country has announced.

According to the latest figures from the UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNAMI), at least 392 civilians were killed and another 613 were injured in acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict.

The head of UNAMI, Ján Kubiš, condemned the deliberate targeting of civilians by the Islamic State (ISIL), and saluted the Iraqi security forces for professionalism in pursuing the terrorists while seeking to minimize civilian casualties.

“As the Iraqi security forces stepped up the military operations to liberate the remaining parts of Mosul from Daesh control, the terrorists struck again, targeting civilians with cowardly bombings to ease the pressure on the frontlines,” Mr. Kubiš said referring to ISIL by its Arabic acronym.

Daesh's sinister attempts have failed to weaken the resolve of the people and Government of Iraq to rid the country once and for all from the scourge of terrorism," added Mr. Kubiš, who is also the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

The figure of 392 is slightly lower than 403 civilians killed in January, when an additional 924 civilians were injured.

Perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Kabul must be brought to justice, stresses UN Security Council

2 March 2017 – Strongly condemning yesterday's terrorist attacks in the Afghan capital, Kabul, the United Nations Security Council underscored the need to bring the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of such reprehensible acts to justice.

At least 15 people were killed and dozens more injured in attacks in two areas of the capital. The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the incidents.

In a statement issued late yesterday, the 15-member Security Council stressed that terrorism in all its forms is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation and wherever, whenever and by whomsoever it is committed.

"[It] should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group," the Security Council highlighted.

Also in the statement, Council members voiced serious concern over threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and other illegal and armed groups to the local population, National Defense and Security Forces and the international presence in the country.

"No violent or terrorist acts can reverse the Afghan-led process along the path towards peace, democracy and stability in Afghanistan, which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan, and by the international community," the Council added.

It also stressed the need for all UN Member States to combat by all means, in accordance with the UN Charter and other obligations under international law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

Further in the statement, the members of the Council expressed their deep

sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and Government of Afghanistan. They also wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

[Humanitarian actors need safe, unhindered access to help Yemen avert famine – UN aid chief](#)

1 March 2017 – The people of crisis-torn Yemen urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection, especially in the north of the country where there is a threat of famine, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator warned today.

The overriding need, said Stephen O'Brien, is for all parties to the conflict to provide immediate and safe access so that humanitarian actors can provide what is needed to stave off famine.

"This will require [...] all parties to stop gamesmanship or efforts to support their side of the fight by producing bureaucratic impediments and delays, or doubts about inspection mechanisms so that commercial shipment can be restored and food and medicines, and crucially, fuel, so water can be pumped out of the aquifers and cereals, the main foodstuff in the remotest areas of the country, can be processed," he explained.

Briefing reporters at UN Headquarters in New York via telephone from the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, Mr. O'Brien recalled that he had headed directly to Yemen from the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, which had generated more than \$670 million in pledges to help sustain critical relief operations over the next two years and beyond across four counties where millions are in need of aid.

He said that along with Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen is among the countries, which, for the first time in modern history, could fall into simultaneous famine. "The common factor between the four potential famines is that they are all in the context of man-made conflicts which have become protracted crises in the absence of a resolution of the underlying causes and an unwillingness of the parties to [...] find their way to a political track."

RELATED: Yemen's health system another victim of the conflict – WHO

Briefing alongside Jamie McGoldrick, the Resident Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. O'Brien highlighted the difficulties faced by relief agencies to bring aid to the communities that need it and reported that yesterday, he and his team were unable to reach the city of Taiz, because it had been stopped at military checkpoint even after assurances had been received.

“It was very disappointing but illustrative. If I could not get through, it would be much more difficult for caravans that require safe and unrestricted access to reach all people in need wherever they are,” he said.

In this regard, he reported that he spoke with the Houthi authorities on his return to Sana’a and had been assured that effort would be made to open the routes for the flow of food and other humanitarian supplies.

He went on to explain that the country’s population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is growing and compounding the challenges of access, food insecurity and health care concerns.

As he continues his visit, Mr. O’Brien s, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said he would meet with Houthi authorities and make clear the expectation that the UN and all humanitarian implementing partners – international and local – should have immediate, safe and unimpeded access to people in need, at all times, help avert a famine, and to help mobilize resources necessary at the pledging conflict in April in Geneva.

AUDIO: Continuing conflict in Yemen has left millions without adequate access to food and water, and the international community needs to do everything it can “now” to fund a major relief effort, says UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien.