

MEDIA RELEASE

19 February 2020 – **For immediate use**

UN visit identifies actions for New Zealand to address housing crisis

“The visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has reinforced the need to view good, affordable homes as a fundamental human right – and highlighted what needs to happen to ensure all New Zealanders are well-housed,” says Scott Figenshow, Chief Executive of Community Housing Aotearoa.

UN Special Rapporteur Leilani Farha has been in New Zealand since 10 February to gather information and insights into how the human right to housing is being realised in New Zealand. She has released a preliminary summary of her findings and recommendations (Ms Farha’s media release and end-of-mission statement is available at <https://www.hrc.co.nz/news/new-zealand-housing-crisis-requires-bold-human-rights-response-says-un-expert/>). A comprehensive report of the visit will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2021.

In her end-of-mission statement Ms Farha calls for innovation and courage in addressing New Zealand’s housing crisis, and calls on the New Zealand Government to develop a human rights-based housing strategy, and also ensure the right to housing is recognised in legislation.

Her recommendations include giving state and community housing providers priority to rent or lease a home offered for rent on the market to ensure that all people on waiting lists can be housed, in regions lacking affordable housing.

Mr Figenshow says the focus areas of Ms Farha’s preliminary report will not be a surprise to most people involved in housing in New Zealand, but they do provide concrete guidance on what needs to be done to make the right to adequate housing real here.

“Ms Farha has observed that while there are current positive steps taken by the Government, successive governments have failed to fulfill their international obligations in relation to housing – for example, investment in social housing has been limited and variable, and housing interventions have been dominated by politically sensitive policy settings,” he says.

“Ms Farha has observed a housing market in which the social housing of function is no longer the dominant force. Ms Farha also reflected on what we think should be one of the key take-outs from this visit – homelessness is a prima facie breach of the human right to housing, and under international law it must be addressed as an urgent priority.

“Ms Farha referred to this as a perfect storm – a housing market in a developed country in which multiple factors are operating at the same time to undermine the human right to housing.

Community Housing Aotearoa is the umbrella group for New Zealand’s community housing sector. Our 90 provider members house approximately 25,000 people nationally across 13,000 homes. More information is available at www.communityhousing.org.nz.

“Ms Farha has consistently voiced the view that a human rights-based housing strategy is the most direct and promising way to re-assert the social function of housing, and protect and promote the human right to housing. Now she has come to New Zealand and made the same finding. We in Aotearoa recognise the remedy for this is not a new policy or a new initiative, but a human rights-based approach to developing a national strategic response.”

Mr Figenshow says Ms Farha’s recommendations echo her prior work around the world, calling for a human rights-based national housing strategy, more innovative and courageous moves to address homelessness, as well as ensuring rights in tenancy. Ms Farha’s observations and recommendations reinforce the importance of the work CHA has commenced through The Shift Aotearoa, with support from the Peter McKenzie Project.

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Please contact:

- Scott Figenshow, Chief Executive, 021 061 9664, director@communityhousing.org.nz
- Cushla Managh, Communications, 021 800 507, cushla.managh@communityhousing.org.nz
- Brennan Rigby, The Shift Aotearoa, 021 836 359, brennan.rigby@communityhousing.org.nz

Background:

A special rapporteur is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. The position is honorary and independent from any institution or government. Ms Farha took up her role in 2014 and has made a number of country visits since, including to Nigeria, France, Egypt, Portugal and India. A lawyer, for the past 20 years she has worked internationally and domestically on the implementation of the right to adequate housing for marginalised groups. She lives in Canada.

More information is available at

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/pages/housingindex.aspx>.

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