

“A COMMON HOME WHERE EVERYBODY CAN LIVE WITH DIGNITY”

Habitat III

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The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.

Pope Francis
Laudato Si

“Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.”¹ On these words, which reflect the deep motivation of an accompaniment in human rights to the peoples and families; we base the right to a decent and adequate housing and a clean, sustainable and accessible environment (Habitat); including cities, villages, rural areas, the countryside, the mountains and the jungle.

This document aims to be a step forward on the way, a recipient full of considerations and proposals about the accompaniment on the right of the most poor and vulnerable to live in a home: who have, as said by Pope Francis, “God’s heart has a special place for the poor.” Our indifference towards our common home and our “cruelty towards fellow creatures” corresponds to the “the treatment we mete out to other human beings” (Laudato Si 92) “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes basic” (LS 158); therefore, “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS 49).

¹ Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”. Chapter four. Section II. Pope Francis. November 2013.

LABOUR, LODGING AND LAND²

The universal right to adequate housing appears in the Universal Declaration of Human rights of 10th December 1948 under article 25: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services.”

It can also be found in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 16th December 1966: “The right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing.” The same right appears in such regional agreements as the European Social Charter, the European Convention of Human Rights and in many country’s regulations (for example, Ecuador).

The Church, which has always been close to those who suffer, the poor and the impoverished because they are so deeply loved, or “preferred”, by the Lord, has long spoken out about this issue. It advocates for the right to decent housing, as a essential element of common the good and of the right to enjoy a fair distribution of the earth’s goods, as a consequence of their universal nature. Housing issue is part of the social issues, about which the Church has been reflecting since Rerum Novarum

To build a
"civilization of love
and peace."
Blessed Pope Paul VI

by Leo XIII, at the end of 19th century, up to the letter Caritas in Veritate by Benedict XVI and the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium by Pope Francis. These teachings consider adequate housing as a specific right of the person and as a key need of all human persons, the provision of which should be provided by public administration.

These same points were highlighted in April 1963 in the letter Pacem in Terris by John XXIII through the following words: “The public administration must therefore

² Discurso del santo padre Francisco a los participantes en el Encuentro Mundial de Movimientos Populares. Octubre 2014

give considerable care and thought to the question of social as well as economic progress, and to the development of essential services in keeping with the expansion of the productive system. Such services include road-building, transportation, communications, drinking-water, housing, medical care..." (n. 64). Fulfilment of these same responsibilities was urged in *Gaudium et Spes* 26, which was issued by the Second Vatican Council.

During the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the letter *Pacem in Terris*, Pope Francis told us that is not enough to guarantee the main civil and political rights, "but every person must also be effectively offered access to the basic means of sustenance, food, water, housing, medical care, education the possibility to form and support a family." The Pope also highlights that these goals must have "absolute priority in national and international action." Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, in the letter *Deus Caritas Est*, tells us that Christians should see the Earth as our common home and should consider every person living on it as brothers and sisters.

For more than a hundred years, the Social Doctrine of the Church has been repeating that respect for fundamental rights of people, both material and spiritual, is the only way to guarantee an adequate life. Such form make an ensemble that must be observed integrally. It is not possible to guarantee some of them and neglect some others. This is demanded by the human dignity and, for Christians, by the fact that all people are sons and daughters of God.

The Church advocates for a home, for housing as a necessary fundamental right in order to live an adequate life, not simply as an economic investment. Housing is a fundamental vital space for social life and a key factor for social inclusion. Lack of housing paralyzes the possibility of exercising social rights and prevents the individual fulfilment. To have a space where one can grow as a person, will make people able to exercise their right to employment, education, participation, health, social protection, etc.

This entails not only home and infrastructure (rural or urban) needed for that adequate life, but also the inclusion of the territory as essential habitat for the peoples (especially the indigenous). Hence that territory must be protected as “sacred right” (Encounter between Pope Francis and the popular movements in Rome, September 2014 and Santa Cruz, Bolivia, July 2015) and as “common home” for all (since most of these ancient territories provide us with water, oxygen, food and energy that are being overexploited and extracted with the aim of immediate profit and without considering people and their dignity as the centre of all).

LIVING IN A HOME. THE COMMON HOME

It is estimated that there are 400,000 homeless people in Europe. During 2005, one million and a half people ended up on the streets in Zimbabwe³ during the middle of the winter season because several slums were demolished. The earthquake in Nepal left thousands of people without a home and 320,000 children sleeping out in the open. In many countries, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, public shelters are not accepting migrants, or they may take them only for limited periods of time. In the city of New York, there are 60,000 homeless people who live in shelters. In Mexico, many children fear to be separated from their parents who live on the streets and cannot provide adequate care, and they fear to end up in an orphanage or a foster home. In Iraq, to feel that you live in a safe and decent place is an impossible mission nowadays: forced displacement (300,000 people at the north of the country), a car bomb, or plundering, can turn home into nightmare in a few seconds. In Medellin (Colombia), during the World Urban Forum, homeless people were removed from the city. Even in places where there has been a high investment in social housing, such as Sao Paulo (Brazil), the interests of the speculative capital have been predominant (Public Defender Report).

³ Report 2015 UN Rapporteur on Adequate Housing <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/294/55/PDF/G1529455.pdf?OpenElement>

In many Asian, Latin American and African countries (like Malawi), a great part of the housing demand is being fulfilled by the growth of casual slums, which are characterised by poor living conditions and lack of access to basic services and infrastructures. These slums usually are located in areas with natural and artificial dangers; in addition, the urban risks are worsened by the raise of the magnitude and unpredictability of the climate change. This needs to be prioritised when talking about “thriving cities” in the New Urban Rights Agenda.

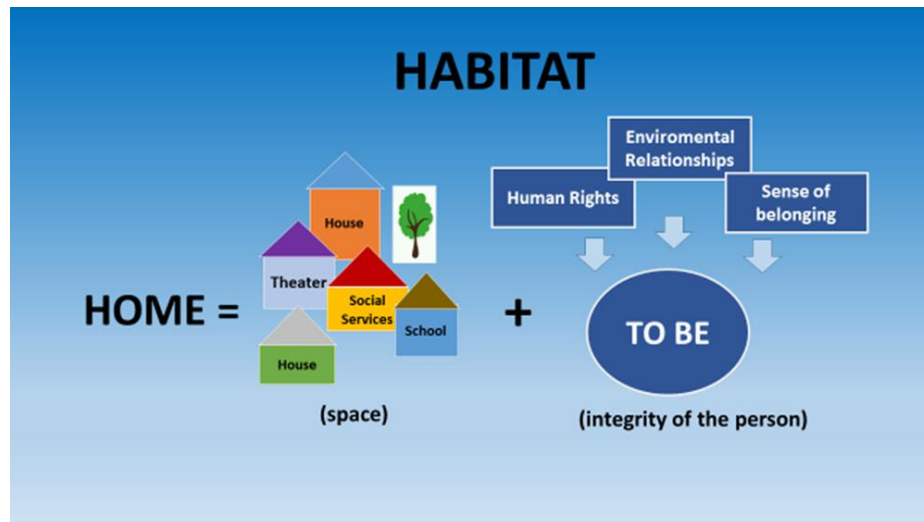
Likewise, the migration reality calls into question daily the objective of a “common home” for all peoples. Migrant communities face difficult challenges related to access to any housing, even more so when looking for adequate and decent housing. There are many elements that contribute to this: absence of affordable social housing, lack of access to rent allowance, administrative procedures, low salaries, and social discrimination and prejudices. Much more in the case of refugees.

Living without a home leads us, in addition, to such problems as the lack of physical space in which to develop as a person and the lack of the “warmth” associated with sharing, growing, belonging, helping, being supported.

We can have a roof (space, housing) under which to find shelter but not the “warmth of a home” because that roof may not be safe (eviction threat, domestic violence, “illegal” squatting or loan with no legal support), or inadequate (slums, overcrowding, informal slums, with no access to supplies); and, as a common situation in many places of the planet, there are people and families that do not have a roof and do not have a home.

There are people who have lost their link to families, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Others encounter great difficulties to find the “way” to build networks back in their daily lives, people who are the last ones among those excluded from society.

There are people who try to reach another country in which to live in peace, without bombings and without their human rights being violated.



We believe that in order to make possible the cross-cutting, shared and interrelated enjoyment of Human Rights together with the access to adequate housing and a clean, sustainable and affordable environment (Habitat), the following is needed:

- **Space:** housing and environment.
- **Integrity of the person:**

Sense of belonging: the human being as unique in itself and in its integral development.

Environmental relationships: the human being plus others (family, neighbourhood, population, society...)

Human rights: Access to, support and guarantee of every, as a whole and at the same level: employment, education, participation, health, social protection, housing, etc.

In this sense, last March 2015, the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing stated, in the Annual Report to the 31st session of the Human Rights Council, that fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goal No.11.1 for a New Urban Rights Agenda in 2030 should include the implementation of the right to have an adequate housing in every aspect: enjoyment, development, guarantee and evaluation; and for everybody. It is the only way to sustain the design of a new Habitat on Human Rights.

“The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity”

Pope Francis

Evangelii Gaudium

As the Social Doctrine of the Church has stated on several occasions, the connection between fundamental rights of people is the key to live in dignity and of their sense of belonging: *“Human rights are to be defended not only individually but also as a whole: protecting them only partially would imply a kind of failure to recognize them. They correspond to the demands of human dignity and entail, in the first place, the fulfilment of the essential needs of the person in the material and spiritual spheres. (...)Universality and indivisibility are distinctive characteristics of human rights: they are ‘two guiding principles which at the same time demand that human rights be rooted in each culture and that their juridical profile be strengthened so as to ensure that they are fully observed.”*⁵

⁴ No. 154 Compendium Social Doctrine of the Church

⁵ Juan Pablo II, Message for the World Day of Peace 1998, 2: AAS 90 (1998) 149

It is on this foundation that Caritas bases its social action aim to guarantee the right to adequate, sustainable, clean and accessible housing and environment for people in situations of vulnerability and/or exclusion, which is grounded in integral and participatory action.

This is necessary especially in a world where economic and market rules prevail and where, in most societies, housing is considered a good investment. Thus it is necessary to confront, for example, such terrible paradoxes as: countries where there are millions of empty housing units but thousands of people and families lose their homes because they cannot pay for them (Spain); other countries where next to informal slums lacking everything you can imagine, “cities of the future” are built with all the most expensive conveniences you can imagine (India) or where large extensions of land belong to a single family with hundreds of other families living along the fence surrounding it (Paraguay).

Pope Francis reminds us that “While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation.” (EG 56). “Therefore,” he insists on saying “No to an economy of exclusion” (EG 53) which prevents millions of women and men, boys and girls, from enjoying an adequate housing in a happy and healthy environment.

In order to achieve the vision of Pope Francis, it is necessary to provide participatory spaces that can design public policies to facilitate the enjoyment by everyone of the options proposed by Habitat, which are adapted to every territory in a way that access to these human rights can be progressively guaranteed for all.

CASE STUDIES

Some proposals being promoted by Caritas Internationalis on how to work for a "common home":

Accompanying the access, use and guarantee of a decent Habitat, are two fundamental goals:

- universality (for every people and community)
- and the participation of the local community as designer (with its own culture and traditions), guide and performer:

CATHOLIC CHARITIES COMMUNITY SERVICES (NEW YORK):

EVICION PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

The lack of affordable housing, together with the cuts in the federal and state budgets (for example, housing programmes cancellation), has contributed to the increase of evictions and homeless population in the city of New York during the last ten years. For this reason, the city has recently faced the necessity of creating several allowances to prevent the eviction of low-income families and individuals (this is much less expensive than creating shelters and refuges, and also avoids any implied social stigmas and alienations). The programmes of the CCCS-Preserving Housing are based in the prevention and use the next seven measures: Analysis of the individual and family situation. Analysis and evaluation of the legal and administrative situation. Evaluation of the profile (possible access or not to any local allowances for people at risk of eviction). Coordinated plan with other NGOs and the different city councils in order to allow funds for rent payment delays. Accompanying the applications for local allowances (2-5 years – permanent). Accompanying services for economic support (training courses on rights and responsibilities related to the renting contracting, etc.) and monitoring during the rehabilitation process (prevention of new crises).

**CORDAID- CARITAS NETHERLANDS: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROJECT:
ACCESS TO DECENT HOUSING IN INFORMAL SLUMS FROM GUATEMALA**

With the aim of ensuring that the vulnerable groups can also enjoy good quality and affordable housing (allowing secure house possession by negotiating affordable loans with the different actors of the market – banks, microfinance, projects, local administrations, etc.).

Also in **emergencies and catastrophic situations:**

**CARITAS IRAK: ACCOMPANYING PEOPLE AND FAMILIES THAT HAVE LOST THEIR
HOUSING DUE TO VIOLENT CAUSES**

From deep work centre on the concepts of peace, reconciliation and pacific coexistence; also, with courses on facing the traumas derived from the loss of housing; and listening to displaced people in order to make them feel that they are not alone. Specially centred on children.

**CARITAS IRÁN: REBUILDING 94 HOUSES FOR SPINAL CORD INJURY PATIENTS CAUSED
DURING THE 2003 BAM EARTHQUAKE**

With the aim of allowing a safe, hygienic and known environment, accessible for the new living situation.

**CARITAS HAITÍ: REHABILITATION AND REBUILDING PROGRAMME “INFRASTRUCTURE
AND HOUSING”**

A permanent and integrated response to the problem of housing in order to provide permanent housing for 5,000 families directly or indirectly affected by the earthquake of the 12th of January (with protection against earthquakes and anticyclones) adapted to the social and economic reality of the environment. Water supply, basic sanitation and permanent housing, together with other Caritas Haiti projects on agriculture, health and solidarity economy.

Analysis of the reality that could be presented in future consciousness-raising:

CARITAS LEBANON: HOUSING SERVICE FOR REFUGEES REPORT “A PLACE TO CALL HOME: AN ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES’ HOUSING IN LEBANON”

“We have learned that it is not enough to provide rent assistance alone. Indeed, this service should always be accompanied by legal protection, awareness of one’s rights, access to justice and fairness under the law. In fact, our newly established mixed service approach: a combination of rent assistance, protection and awareness services; has proved to be highly effective and satisfying to most refugees.” (Presentation of the Report by the Director of the Caritas Lebanon Migrants Centre).

<http://english.caritasmigrant.org.lb/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Final-Housing-.pdf>

Training:

CARITAS SPAIN: PUBLICATION “RIGHT FOR DECENT AND ADEQUATE HOUSING” (“EL DERECHO A UNA VIVIENDA DIGNA Y ADECUADA”) FROM THE COLLECTION “THE RIGHTS IN OUR ACCOMPANIMENT” (“LOS DERECHOS EN NUESTRO ACOMPAÑAMIENTO”)

A group from the Diocesan Caritas and the Housing Programme of Caritas Spain elaborated a framework document, with an analysis of the situation of this Human Right in Spain (with special focus on the most vulnerable people), and proposals on social intervention, consciousness rising and influencing due to the current housing emergency, which has left 500,000 evictions in five years.

http://www.caritas.es/publicaciones_compra.aspx?Id=4887&Idioma=1&Diocesis=1

Influencing political actors:

CARITAS PHILIPPINES: ADVOCACY AND CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING RELATED TO LAND RIGHTS

For people and families who have lost their housing (natural disasters) and are relocated without decent conditions and without access to Human Rights.

<http://www.caritasphilippines.org/2015/09/05/church-condemns-inhumane-dispersal-of-farmers-protest/>