



REPORT
FROM THE
ANGLICAN
COMMUNION
OFFICE AT
THE UNITED
NATIONS

Report on the Anglican Communion Office at the United Nations' Attendance at the Commission for Social Development 2020



COMMISSION for
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York.

10- 19 FEBRUARY 2020

REPORT ON THE 58TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) is an Intergovernmental body established in 1946 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

The United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) held its fifty-eighth session from 10 to 19 February 2020 with the priority theme of “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness”. This was the first time the issue of homelessness has been addressed at the United Nations in an official form. The main objective of the high-level component of the CSocD58 was to share good practices and lessons learned on how countries can improve access to affordable housing through integrated housing policies, as well as to share innovative approaches and strategies that have proven to be effective in preventing and addressing homelessness.

Through the Commission, discussions on the priority theme of housing, homelessness, and social protection systems centered mostly on 1) defining homelessness and 2) how to measure levels of homelessness. As the international community does not yet have a globally accepted definition of “homelessness”, these two points were defined as the main pillars in working towards of sustainable solution to homelessness across the world.

The Commission was also an opportunity to celebrate and review the last 25 years of progress towards fully realizing social inclusion around the world by revisiting the importance of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its program of Action, which was signed at the World Summit on Social Development in 1995.



REPORT ON THE 58TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The 58th session of the Commission on Social Development (CSocD58) resulted in two resolutions. The first resolution addressed the priority theme, which urged member states to continue sharing information and implementing affordable housing and social protection policies to address the global issue of homelessness.

The second resolution approved the topic for the 59th session of the Commission on Social Development to be held in 2021. The topic that was proposed and accepted is: “New Partnership for Africa’s Development: progress in implementation and international support.” All in all, this year was a clear success and a step forward in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Advocacy Officer and head of the Anglican Communion’s Office to the United Nation’s New York Office, Jillian Abballe represented the Anglican Communion at the conference. She was able to monitor discussions at high-level sessions and side events, as well as share the Anglican Communion’s work on addressing homelessness.

This report provides a summary of the discussions at the Commission and identifies key themes that civil society, faith based organizations, policy makers, member states, and other stakeholders must take forward in their work towards addressing housing crises and homelessness around the world. Additionally, the report spotlights the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Housing as an initiative of religious actors and faith communities to address these issues as well as two other examples from across the Communion of how Anglican churches and agencies are working to address homelessness.



DISCUSSIONS AT THE FORUM

During CSocD58, the Anglican Communion's Office at the United Nations focused on participating in discussions related to strategies for affordable housing and homelessness prevention. This session was the first time the topic of homelessness has ever been debated at an official UN conference to the lament of many UN officials and civil society organizations. Globally, 100 million people were estimated to live in homelessness in 2005 (the latest count by the United Nations), and 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year (UN-Habitat). Only a few countries around the world have a national strategy to combat homelessness although the problem has continued to increase in many countries in the Global South, as well as in the United Kingdom. and the United States.

The conversations during the first high-level panel on the priority theme centered mostly on definition and measurement as the two main pillars needed to begin addressing homelessness around the world. The international community, policy makers, and advocates identified that there is still no universal definition of homelessness that encompasses all its' forms across countries. As a result, homelessness has different definitions at global, national, and local levels. Without a broadly-accepted definition, the scope of the problem can't be properly assessed nor can it be assessed consistently across contexts. Therefore, it is difficult to determine appropriate measures to remediate without a full picture of the scope of the issue.

On par with the lack of a universal definition is the issue of measurement. Several high-level officials noted that to properly tackle this issue we need to be able to collect accurate and updated data that encompasses all forms of homelessness based on a global definition. Without this data, states will not be able to adequately track progress or stay accountable to international commitments.



The Commission highlighted the many forms homelessness can take, noting that it is more pervasive than meets the eye. Whether homelessness is temporary, transitional, or rooted in structural violence, homelessness affects people from all backgrounds. It has been recorded to be prevalent among youth, women, and indigenous people in recent years, and can affect individuals or entire families.

Addressing homelessness through a human rights lens on a global scale was one of the main topics discussed at this year's conference. Officials, civil society representatives, and member state representatives agreed that it is only through a holistic approach to housing, homelessness, and the needs of marginalized communities could the issue of homelessness be mitigated. Although addressing existing cases of homelessness is pivotal, prevention is still the most effective way to sustainably tackle this issue. One strategy put forward during the Session was to enhance the affordability and availability of housing. For example, Norway and Finland have become examples of affordable housing best practice and demonstrate ways to address homelessness through policy and action. Both countries have implemented a "Housing First" approach, a global set of guidelines that informs how countries can provide permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness and design policies that emphasize housing as a starting point rather than an end goal. The principles of "Housing First" continue to inform policies and approaches throughout the USA, Canada and Europe.

The 58th Session of the Commission was also an opportunity to celebrate and review the last 25 years of progress towards fully realizing social inclusion around the world by revisiting the importance of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development. Since 1995, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its Programme of Action have guided multilateral action on these issues since 1995. Adopted at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen in March 1995, the Declaration emphasized the eradication of poverty as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative.



It also represented a unique consensus on three key objectives of social development: eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and fostering social inclusion. The Copenhagen Declaration is still seen as a framework for a holistic approach to achieve these objectives, and upholds the principles of people-centered development.

The theme of this year's Commission on Social Development was long overdue to be discussed and addressed at a global level and through multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation. As homelessness continues to increase throughout the world due to climate change, migration, economic recession, and violence, the issue warrants the UN's full attention. Housing and adequate and affordable living conditions are a fundamental human right and, therefore, need to be addressed with a concerted effort by multiple stakeholders.

Additionally, it is also pivotal for faith communities to also provide spiritual guidance and aid to those who find themselves homeless, and fulfill our calling to serve all of God's children. In the following section, we highlight the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, as well as other examples from across the Communion at how Anglican churches, communities, and agencies are working to address homelessness.

"If the purpose of housing was understood as building homes and communities, not merely building accommodation with bricks and mortar, the whole nature of the industry would be changed."

- Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby



THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY'S COMMISSION ON HOUSING, CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

The United Kingdom is among the countries currently experiencing a major housing crisis. Homelessness, in particular, is commonly mistaken to be only a matter of lack of housing, but a broader definition of homelessness would also include a lack of community support for the individual or family experiencing homelessness. Confronted with the stark reality of the U.K. and the Christian vocation to carry out the teachings of justice and well-being for all, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has inaugurated a Commission on Housing, Church and Community. This Commission will focus both on the construction of physical houses, but also on rebuilding spirits of those within communities. The Archbishop hopes to re-imagine housing policy by making recommendations to Governments and other key actors, as well as to look inward and determine how the Church can play its part in combating homelessness happening in their provinces.

The Commission is meant to work in four streams, each one designed to influence a different audience:

1. **Theology:** Led by the Right Reverend Dr Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington, this work stream aims to use a Christian framework to understand housing and community-building issues, and how to best address them from a place of fellowship.
2. **Policy:** Led by Sir Robert Devereux KCB, this stream will offer policy recommendations to Government and the housing sector to shape the trajectory of future housing policy.
3. **National Church Institutions and Dioceses:** Led by Chris Beales, this stream will focus on how these institutions can contribute to the creation of sustainable communities.
4. **Local Church and Community:** Led by Lynne Cullens, this stream will equip local churches to meet the housing needs of their communities.



RESPONSES TO THE HOUSING CRISIS FROM ACROSS THE COMMUNION

DIOCESE OF OTTOWA, CANADA

Confronted with the significant crisis of homelessness and housing affordability in the province of Ontario, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Diocese of Ottawa have officially declared the issues of homelessness and affordable housing as priorities for the Church. This decision resulted from the repeated observance of increased marginalization and isolation of the most vulnerable population including rural and indigenous communities.

The Ottawa Diocese has set two main goals for their work on the issue of homelessness by 2021, its' 125th anniversary:

1. To create 125 new units of affordable housing within the Diocese
2. To engage every parish in efforts to pray, learn, advocate, and act to end homelessness through affordable housing.

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET, NEW YORK

The Episcopal Church's Trinity Church Wall Street in New York City has responded to the housing and homelessness crisis in New York by creating the Housing and Homelessness Initiative. This initiative seeks to break the cycle of mass homelessness and housing instability in New York City by advancing Trinity's mission priority to build up their neighborhood by advocating for individuals who find themselves in shelters or who are on the brink of losing their housing.

In response to this crisis, the Housing and Homelessness Initiative seeks to support not-for-profits, networks, and coalitions whose work falls within three areas of focus:

1. **Prevent:** Promote housing stability and prevention of homelessness by supporting the creation of affordable housing.
2. **Lead:** Help end the cycle of mass homelessness for NYC families.
3. **Liberate:** Help end homelessness for previously incarcerated New Yorkers.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Anglican Communion News Service:

<https://www.anglicannews.org/tag/homeless.aspx>

Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/ABChousing#na>

Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included.html>

CSocD58 Civil Society Forum 2020: <https://ngosocdev.org/what-we-do/commission-for-social-development/csocd58-and-civil-society-forum-2020/>

CSocD58 Documents and Resolutions:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development/csocd-social-policy-and-development-division/csocd58.html>

CSocD58 Member States: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2018/12/CSocD57-Membership.pdf>

CSocD58 Official Report: <https://undocs.org/E/2020/26>

Diocese of Ottawa, Homelessness and Affordable Housing:

<https://ottawa.anglican.ca/homelessness/>

NGO Committee on Social Development Civil Society Declaration for CSocD58:

https://ngosocialdevelopment.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/csocd58_civilsocietydeclaration.pdf

Trinity Wall Street's Housing and Homelessness Strategic Initiative:

<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/social-justice/trinity-grants/housing-and-homelessness>

This report was drafted by Marla Teixeira, Research and Administration Assistant (New York), and Jillian Abballe, Advocacy Manager and Head of Office (New York). For more information about the Anglican Communion Office at the United Nations and to get involved in our work, please visit our website: www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/at-the-un.

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