

OTTAWA, ON (May 30, 2018)

SUBMISSION BY THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF OTTAWA TO THE CANADIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS ON A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO HOUSING

Faith-based organisations are key supportive stakeholders for a NHS

The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa welcomes the government's invitation to comment on the Discussion Paper, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing*.

We are one of 31 dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada, with 1,700 parishes from coast to coast to coast. Many dioceses support ministries, similar to ours, **which provide housing and vital support services to the homeless and the housing disadvantaged and actively promote the right to affordable and adequate housing.**

In our earlier submission to the Federal government's National Housing Strategy consultations, in our meetings with elected officials and public servants, and in the public domain, we said that **faith-based organizations contribute extensively and uniquely to housing programs and delivery models that aim to ensure access to housing as a basic human right.**

Implementation of the National Housing Strategy is a high priority

We commend the government for establishing the National Housing Strategy, which in itself is a big step towards adequate housing for all, and for its commitment to unprecedented and multi-year funding. **We urge all orders of government to prioritize the implementation of the strategy and to commit to its funding.** This is all the more important in the light of the challenges to renew the Homelessness Partnering Strategy by the target date of April 1, 2019, to have an effective portable Canada Housing Benefit in place by 2020 and to implement the Human Rights-based Approach to Housing by the end of this year.

Of the proposed five elements to the Human Rights-Based Approach, the most important is its codification through legislation

The government is proposing five elements to the Human Rights-Based Approach. We believe **the commitment to legislation is by far the most important** of the five, as outlined in section five below.

1. Having a **Federal Housing Advocate** can play an important role in the effective implementation of the NHS. However, we question the desirability and effectiveness of an advocate as a staff member of CMHC. As the Advocate would be appointed by CMHC, it is doubtful that the office would be truly independent and impartial.

Furthermore, the Advocate is intended to focus on those in greatest housing need and to provide advice to CMHC. However, CMHC already has capable and dedicated staff who focus on those in housing need. We question whether adding another position at CMHC will achieve the government's intentions. **If one is appointed, the Housing Advocate would have greater impact if the position were independent and at arm's length of CMHC and accountable and responsible to Parliament.**

2. The proposed **National Housing Council** is expected to be in place by the end of 2018. We urge the government to proceed with caution **to avoid any overlap, duplication, and redundancy.** Insofar as the Council is to embrace representation from all levels of government it should not duplicate the work of the Federal-Provincial Territorial Minister of Housing and attendant research.

3. The **Community Based Tenant Initiative** has the potential to assist the most vulnerable tenants. It will be important to **channel funding to assist those in greatest need**. Its success will depend on the **operational criteria** the government establishes. For example, what credentials will an organization need to prove to qualify for funding? What is the definition of “help”?
4. The **Public Engagement Campaign** planned for 2020 will need to be sensitive to regional and local differences. If the other elements of the initiative are strengthened, the need for spending public funds on public relations will be reduced. An annual report by a qualified and independent Advocate would by itself attract broad national media attention.
5. **Codification through legislation of a Human-Rights based approach is vital to the effectiveness of a NHS**. Legislation, we understood, was the government’s first priority. Last fall on Parliament Hill our bishop, The Right Reverend John Chapman, joined with representatives of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing to **call on Canada to meet its obligation under the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. That meant legislation to provide a legal right that would protect the most vulnerable among us.

In Canada the obligation to protect the most vulnerable, consistent with the UN Covenant, carries a particular responsibility for indigenous Canadians. **The government’s legislative proposal to require the maintenance of a National Housing Strategy must extend to the Indigenous National Housing Strategy which remains under development**. No single group in Canada stands to benefit more from the government’s legislative proposal to establish a National Housing Advocate.

The promotion of a human rights-based approach to housing is commendable. The government has adopted an admirable vision. The requirements in the proposed legislation to maintain a national strategy and to report every three years to Parliament on progress in achieving the strategy are steps in the right direction, although we would prefer to see an **annual report instead**. As noted earlier if the government were to establish a housing advocate independent of CMHC and responsible to Parliament it would make sense for the officer to report to and be accountable to Parliament.

The government’s vision recognizes the obligation under the UN Covenant to provide adequate housing for all Canadians. Realization of that goal requires that the right to housing be enshrined in legislation. The proposed legislation as outlined in the consultation paper provides measures (a housing advocate, reporting to Parliament) that will highlight Canada’s progress, or lack of, in meeting its obligations. **But it falls far short of providing a legal right as envisaged in the UN Covenant**.

The federal government recognizes its shared jurisdiction with the provinces and territories in housing. Yet without support from the other orders of government, including municipalities, in the delivery of programs, Canada will fall farther short of its obligations. **As the leading funder of assisted housing in the country, the federal government is in a position to use its financial leverage to enlist support of the provinces and territories in supporting the obligation**.

We are particularly concerned that **women’s equal right to adequate housing be reflected in all aspects of national housing strategy**. This right is also considered an obligation that Canada supports by adopting the UN Covenant. The Diocese of Ottawa operates Cornerstone Housing for Women in Ottawa, filling a critical need through a range of housing options. As such, we can testify that women have distinct housing experiences and are sometimes impacted disproportionately by the factors that lead to homelessness.



Specifically, we endorse the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness that the government redraft the definition of homelessness to ensure it does not discriminate against women. The committee reported that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, as it is currently structured, does not address the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness because women experiencing homelessness are often not considered homeless for the purpose of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

We urge the government to build on the framework it has proposed to fulfill more fully the letter as well as the spirit of its obligations under the UN Covenant.