

GENEVA (18 August 2020) – Warning of an impending tsunami of evictions, the UN’s expert on housing rights today called on governments around the world to halt all evictions until the COVID-19 pandemic ends.

“I am alarmed at the global increase in forced evictions,” said Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the UN special rapporteur on the right to housing. “The right to housing is central to any response to the pandemic, but now we are seeing an acceleration in evictions and home demolitions.”

“Losing your home during this pandemic could mean losing your life,” he added. “The rights to life and adequate housing are intrinsically linked.”

Even though some governments have put in place temporary bans on forced evictions, many people continue to lose their homes. More than 11,000 people were thrown out of their homes in [Brazil](#) and [Kenya](#), and more are at risk of eviction. Forced relocation is a threat in countries like [Haiti](#) and increasing in many others, and Rajagopal emphasised that the danger is global.

“Temporary bans in many countries have ended or are coming to an end, and this raises serious concerns that a tsunami of evictions may follow,” he warned.

“Governments must not allow people to become homeless during this pandemic because they lose their job and cannot pay their rent or mortgage.”

A moratorium is also essential on clearing encampments or tent cities of homeless people, he said.

“Forced evictions are an outrageous violation of human rights, including the right to adequate housing,” Rajagopal said. “During a pandemic, when people are asked to stay home to protect themselves and others, forced evictions are even more odious and may constitute grave violations of humanitarian law.” He warned that when people are deprived of shelter, they become more vulnerable to COVID-19 “and this heightens the risk of widespread contagion.”

“I call upon all States to comply with their human rights obligations and ensure that no one is left in a position of increased vulnerability to COVID-19,” he said.

Individuals, families or communities that have already been evicted must be guaranteed access to justice, he said. He called on governments to follow the [guidance note on forced evictions](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic issued by his predecessor.

ENDS

The Expert: Balakrishnan Rajagopal (USA) is the [UN special rapporteur on the right to housing](#) as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context. He took up his mandate in May 2020. Mr. Rajagopal is a Professor of Law and Development at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT. He is the founder of the Displacement Research and Action Network at MIT. He has conducted over 20 years of research on social movements and human rights advocacy around the world focusing in particular, on land and property rights, evictions and displacement. He has a law degree from University of Madras, India, a master's degree in law from the American University, as well as an interdisciplinary doctorate in law from Harvard Law School. He served as a human rights advisor to the World Commission on Dams, with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia. He has published numerous books and scholarly articles, including research reports on evictions, displacement, human rights and housing.

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