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July 10, 2020
VIA EMAIL

TO: Chair and Members of the Emergency and Community Services Committee

Re: Dismantlement of Homeless Encampments

Thank you for approving our written delegation. We submit this delegation on behalf of the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and we have further partnered with Wade Poziomka, a partner with Ross & McBride, to highlight concerns relating to the dismantlement of homeless encampments.

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic has worked with HAMSMaRT and Keeping Six with respect to the ticketing of individuals experiencing homelessness for offences under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (“EMCPA”) and related by-laws.

We appreciate that homeless encampments present unique challenges for the City, and that the City is required to respond to resident complaints with respect to same. In the midst of gaining compliance with EMCPA, the *Trespass to Property Act*, and local by-laws regarding the usage of park or public spaces, it is imperative to ensure that vulnerable groups, especially those who are experiencing homelessness, are not being penalized because of their socio-economic circumstances and/or disabilities, including mental health disabilities.

Throughout the duration of the pandemic, HAMSMaRT and Keeping Six have repeatedly implored the City to either not remove individuals from encampments, or to ensure that they are transitioned to stable housing. They have cited the CDC Guidelines, Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials, (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>), which recommend that people not be moved from encampments “*unless individual housing units are available*” (*Emphasis Added*). Without going into detail, the Guidelines further explain the personal and public health risks involved in displacing people during the pandemic.

We agree that there are significant health-related reasons not to remove individuals experiencing homelessness from their encampments. We further submit that there are significant legal reasons to refrain from this conduct. The issue of homeless encampments, specifically during COVID-19, is not unique to Hamilton. Other municipalities have had to grapple with how to respond to public concerns while protecting private and public health interests. In Toronto, a coalition of legal clinics and advocates for individuals experiencing homelessness recently filed a lawsuit against the City which alleged, amongst other things, that the City failed to provide physical distancing standards across the shelter system. The litigation alleged that, by failing to ensure physical distancing within the shelter system, the City had infringed on the shelter residents’ life, liberty, and security of the person, and their right to equal treatment (guaranteed under sections 7 and 15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* respectively).

The City of Toronto entered into an Interim Settlement Agreement and committed to numerous enforceable commitments relating to conditions in all shelter, respites, drop-ins and COVID-19 homelessness response hotel rooms operated or funded by the City. As of this week, the same coalition is taking the City back to court for failure to comply with the settlement terms. It is important to note that the declined capacity of the shelter system and failure to provide alternatives to congregate shelter has led hundreds of people to remain in encampments and to continue sleeping rough.

There is also precedent for jurisdictions moving in the right direction. In London, the City made the decision to allow temporary encampments and individual tents on municipal property for the duration of the pandemic with the ultimate goal of getting people housed. On July 7, Kingston City Council voted to extend by-law exemptions allowing an encampment to remain until at least July 31.

In British Columbia, the issue of dismantling homeless encampments as a *Charter* issue was specifically dealt with in two cases. In *Victoria (City) v. Adams*, 2009 BCCA 563 and *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz*, 2016 BCSC 2437, the application of parks and streets bylaws prohibiting erecting a shelter was challenged primarily under section 7 of the *Charter*. The Courts found that, insofar as the by-laws prevented people from erecting temporary shelter for protection from the elements, this was a violation of their section 7 rights, and consequently of no force and effect. From our perspective, the right to erect temporary shelter for protection from the real and legitimate risk presented by COVID-19, when no other viable options for some individuals, presents a parallel fact pattern.

Housing is a basic human right. The right to adequate, safe housing, is further heightened during the era of COVID-19. Dismantling homeless encampments, in light of the significant risks to the individuals who are forced to move, infringes on their right to life, liberty, and security of the person. Given that many of the affected individuals are racialized, and/or have mental health, addiction and physical disabilities, these groups are also disproportionately impacted by displacement.

The City has a legal duty to accommodate individuals staying in encampments pursuant to its obligations under the *Human Rights Code* (the “Code”). As you know, there are many reasons why individuals “sleep rough” in encampments. Some of those reasons are unique to COVID-19 (a legitimate fear of exposure while in shelter). Other reasons for residing in encampments are directly related to *Code*-protected grounds. For example:

- Some individuals have mental health challenges that effectively preclude them from functioning in a shelter setting;
- Some individuals have drug or alcohol dependencies (addictions), and are ejected from shelters as a result of use (a symptom of their disability);
- Some individuals are unable to give up an animal, often the only companion they have and a necessity for emotional regulation, because some shelters do not permit animals, and
- Some individuals are married or in common law relationships, and most shelters do not accommodate couples.

The list of reasons why people may occupy encampments is extensive – what is clear is that those reasons are frequently related to *Code*-protected grounds. The fractures that exist in the shelter systems during the best of times are highlighted and exacerbated during the pandemic we are all experiencing. Rather than engage in knee-jerk reactions that results in dismantlement, it is imperative the City to work with social service organizations, local communities and experts to fully understand the situation and take steps to correct the problems with the system. The City needs to look at this situation holistically, instead of in a piecemeal fashion primarily focused on the rights of property owners and an unrealistic assessment of the threat posed by encampments.

It is essential that the City follow the principles set out in the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s “Policy Statement on a Human-Rights Approach to Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic” to ensure that everyone’s human rights are protected. Without these considerations, low income, racialized, Black, and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, persons with physical and mental health disabilities, youth, and the 2S & LGBTQAI+ communities may be disproportionately impacted in the course of enforcement.

It is also essential that the City follow the principles developed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing in “A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada: A Human Rights Approach” calling for a rights-based response to encampments. Such a response requires that:

1. All government action with respect to homeless encampments upholds the human rights and human dignity of their residents;
2. Governments will not resort to criminalization, penalization or obstruction of homeless encampments;
3. Governments must explore all viable alternatives to eviction and may not remove residents from encampments without identifying alternative places to live that are acceptable to them;
4. Governments provide adequate alternative housing to all residents prior to any eviction.

5. Residents will meaningfully participate in all decision-making processes that directly affect them and engage in any decisions regarding relocation;
6. Relocation must not result in the continuation or exacerbation of homelessness, or require the fracturing of families or partnerships.

There have been several incidents of the City dismantling homeless encampments during the pandemic: from small groups or individuals along railways, to Sir John A. MacDonald, Jackie Washington and Ferrie St. While efforts were made to connect displaced individuals with supports, those efforts fell short of meeting actual needs. Several of the individuals placed in hotels or shelters were discharged shortly after for being unable (by virtue of disability) to conform to shelter and hotel rules. Others simply moved on, and have lost contact with the crucial medical and social supports previously accessed.

We acknowledge, and are thankful that the City has refrained from further dismantling in recent weeks. We also understand that there is an expiration date on current encampments, and that the City is facing considerable pressure from residents to move people along. The difficulty is that the City does not have a viable plan for many of those individuals. We therefore call on the City to immediately change its policy on homeless encampments as follows:

1. The City will not dismantle homeless encampments and/or displace of its residents unless it has first arranged for and/or secured inside spaces such as shelters, hotels, interim housing and/or individual housing units in stable, secure housing with appropriate supports. We encourage the City to prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness for urgent housing placement. In the context of shelter and hotel placements, the City must consult with stakeholders in the homelessness/shelter community to determine what supports are needed, how to remove barriers from hotel stays, and how existing shelter rules may need to be changed in order to accommodate individual needs.
2. Where inside spaces are not available, the City will not dismantle homeless encampments and/or displace of its residents. Such objective can be accomplished by one of the following initiatives:
 - a. The designation of specific parks/public lands wherein individuals experiencing homelessness are allowed to set up tents/temporary structures. The City should consult with stakeholders prior to the designation to ensure that the sites are appropriately accessible for individuals and their support network;
 - b. In the alternative, a streamlined, low-barrier, accessible process of issuing permits allowing for tents/temporary structures;
 - c. Where encampments are located on private property, refraining from any enforcement measures save and except where property owners have made complaints. Any individuals removed would then be directed to a viable alternative as set out in subparagraphs a. and b. above.

We acknowledge the complexity of homeless encampments and appreciate the fact that encampments are not a solution to homelessness. However, we submit that it is critical that the City not dismantle homeless encampments until it can provide encampment residents with adequate housing with appropriate supports. Failure to do this will result in a violation of the basic human rights and dignity of all encampment residents in the City of Hamilton.

Respectfully,

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This guidance is an update of <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>

Summary of Recent Changes

A revision was made on 4/21/2020 to reflect the following:

- Revisions to document organization for clarity
- Description of “whole community” approach
- Description of considerations for facility layout
- Description of considerations for facility processes
- Revisions with the understanding that many people might be asymptotically infected with COVID-19
- Clarification of cloth face covering use by clients and staff
- Clarification of personal protective equipment use by staff
- Updated resources

Interim guidance for homeless service providers to plan and respond to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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This interim guidance is based on what is currently known [about Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will update this interim guidance as needed, and as additional information becomes available.

People experiencing homelessness are at risk for infection during community spread of COVID-19. This interim guidance is intended to support response planning by emergency management officials, public health authorities, and homeless service providers, including overnight emergency shelters, day shelters, and meal service providers.

COVID-19 is caused by a new coronavirus. We are learning about [how it spreads, how severe it is, and other features of the disease](#). Transmission of COVID-19 in your community could cause illness among people experiencing homelessness, contribute to an increase in emergency shelter usage, and/or lead to illness and absenteeism among homeless service provider staff.

Early and sustained action to slow the spread of COVID-19 will keep staff and volunteers healthy, and help your organization maintain normal operations.

Community coalition-based COVID-19 prevention and response

Planning and response to COVID-19 transmission among people experiencing homelessness requires a ["whole community"](#) approach, which means that you are involving partners in the development of your response planning, and that everyone's roles and responsibilities are clear. Table 1 outlines some of the activities and key partners to consider for a whole-community approach.

Table 1: Using a community-wide approach to prepare for COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness

Connect to community-wide planning
<p>Connect with key partners to make sure that you can all easily communicate with each other while preparing for and responding to cases. A community coalition focused on COVID-19 planning and response should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local and state health departments• Homeless service providers and Continuum of Care leadership• Emergency management• Law enforcement• Healthcare providers• Housing authorities• Local government leadership• Other support services like outreach, case management, and behavioral health support
Identify additional sites and resources

Continuing homeless services during community spread of COVID-19 is critical, and homeless shelters should not close or exclude people who are having symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 without a plan for where these clients can safely access services and stay.

Decisions about whether clients with mild illness due to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should remain in a shelter, or be directed to alternative housing sites, should be made in coordination with local health authorities. Community coalitions should identify additional temporary housing and shelter sites that are able to provide appropriate services, supplies, and staffing.

Ideally, these additional sites should include:

- Overflow sites to accommodate shelter decompression (to reduce crowding) and higher shelter demands
- Isolation sites for people who are confirmed to be positive for COVID-19
- Quarantine sites for people who are waiting to be tested, or who know that they were exposed to COVID-19
- Protective housing for people who are at [highest risk of severe COVID-19](#)

Depending on resources and staff availability, non-group housing options (such as hotels/motels) that have individual rooms should be considered for the overflow, quarantine, and protective housing sites. In addition, plan for how to connect clients to housing opportunities after they have completed their stay in these temporary sites.

Communication

- Stay updated on the local level of transmission of COVID-19 through your local and state health departments.
- Communicate clearly with staff and clients.
 - Use [health messages and materials developed](#) by credible public health sources, such as your local and state public health departments or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
 - Post signs at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on [hand washing](#) and [cough etiquette, use of cloth face coverings, and social distancing](#).
 - Provide educational materials about COVID-19 for [non-English speakers](#) or hearing impaired, as needed.
 - Keep staff and clients up-to-date on changes in facility procedures.
 - Ensure communication with clients and key partners about changes in program policies and/or changes in physical location.
- Identify platforms for communications such as a hotline, automated text messaging, or a website to help disseminate information to those inside and outside your organization. Learn more about [communicating to workers in a crisis](#).

- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to workers, volunteers, and those you serve. Learn more about [reaching people of diverse languages and cultures](#).

Supplies

Have supplies on hand for staff, volunteers, and those you serve, such as:

- Soap
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol
- Tissues
- Trash baskets
- Cloth face coverings
- Cleaning supplies
- Personal protective equipment (PPE), as needed by staff (see below)

Staff considerations

- Provide training and educational materials related to COVID-19 for staff and volunteers.
- Minimize the number of staff members who have face-to-face interactions with clients with respiratory symptoms.
- Develop and use contingency plans for increased absenteeism caused by employee illness or by illness in employees' family members. These plans might include extending hours, cross-training current employees, or hiring temporary employees.
- Staff and volunteers who are at [higher risk](#) for severe illness from COVID-19 should not be designated as caregivers for sick clients who are staying in the shelter. Identify flexible job duties for these higher risk staff and volunteers so they can continue working while minimizing direct contact with clients.
- Put in place plans on how to maintain social distancing (remaining at least 6 feet apart) between all clients and staff while still providing necessary services.
- All staff should wear a cloth face covering for source control (when someone wears a covering over their mouth and nose to contain respiratory droplets), consistent with the [guidance for the general public](#). See below for information on laundering cloth face coverings.
- Staff who do not interact closely (e.g., within 6 feet) with sick clients and do not clean client environments do not need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Staff should avoid handling client belongings. If staff are handling client belongings, they should use disposable gloves, if available. Make sure to train any staff using gloves to [ensure proper use and ensure they perform hand hygiene before and after use](#). If gloves are unavailable, staff should perform [hand hygiene](#) immediately after handling client belongings.
- Staff who are checking [client temperatures](#) should use a system that creates a physical barrier between the client and the screener as described [here](#).

- Screeners should stand behind a physical barrier, such as a glass or plastic window or partition that can protect the staff member's face from respiratory droplets that may be produced if the client sneezes, coughs, or talks.
- If social distancing or barrier/partition controls cannot be put in place during screening, PPE (i.e., facemask, eye protection [goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of the face], and a single pair of disposable gloves) can be used when within 6 feet of a client.
- However, given PPE shortages, training requirements, and because PPE alone is less effective than a barrier, try to use a barrier whenever you can.
- For situations where staff are providing medical care to clients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and close contact (within 6 feet) cannot be avoided, staff should at a minimum, wear eye protection (goggles or face shield), an N95 or higher level respirator (or a facemask if respirators are not available or staff are not fit tested), disposable gown, and disposable gloves. **Cloth face coverings are not PPE and should not be used when a respirator or facemask is indicated.** If staff have direct contact with the client, they should also wear gloves. Infection control guidelines for healthcare providers are outlined [here](#).
- Staff should launder work uniforms or clothes after use using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.
- Provide resources for stress and coping to staff. Learn more about [mental health and coping](#) during COVID-19.

Facility layout considerations

- Use physical barriers to protect staff who will have interactions with clients with unknown infection status (e.g., check-in staff). For example, install a sneeze guard at the check-in desk or place an additional table between staff and clients to increase the distance between them to at least 6 feet.
- In meal service areas, create at least 6 feet of space between seats, and/or allow either for food to be delivered to clients or for clients to take food away.
- In general sleeping areas (for those who are not experiencing respiratory symptoms), try to make sure client's faces are at least 6 feet apart.
 - Align mats/beds so clients sleep head-to-toe.
- For clients with mild respiratory [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19:
 - Prioritize these clients for individual rooms.
 - If individual rooms are not available, consider using a large, well-ventilated room.
 - Keep mats/beds at least 6 feet apart.
 - Use temporary barriers between mats/beds, such as curtains.
 - Align mats/beds so clients sleep head-to-toe.
 - If possible, designate a separate bathroom for these clients.
 - If areas where these clients can stay are not available in the facility, facilitate transfer to a quarantine site.
- For clients with confirmed COVID-19, regardless of symptoms:
 - Prioritize these clients for individual rooms.

- If more than one person has tested positive, these clients can stay in the same area.
- Designate a separate bathroom for these clients.
- Follow CDC [recommendations](#) for how to prevent further spread in your facility.
- If areas where these clients can stay are not available in the facility, assist with transfer to an isolation site.

Facility procedure considerations

- Plan to maintain regular operations to the extent possible.
- Limit visitors who are not clients, staff, or volunteers.
- Do not require a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test for entry to a homeless services site unless otherwise directed by local or state health authorities.
- Identify clients who could be at [high risk](#) for complications from COVID-19, or from other chronic or acute illnesses, and encourage them to take extra precautions.
- Arrange for continuity of and surge support for mental health, substance use treatment services, and general medical care.
- Identify a designated medical facility to refer clients who might have COVID-19.
- Keep in mind that clients and staff might be infected without showing symptoms.
 - Create a way to make physical distancing between clients and staff easier, such as staggering meal services or having maximum occupancy limits for common rooms and bathrooms.
 - All clients should wear [cloth face coverings](#) any time they are not in their room or on their bed/mat (in shared sleeping areas). Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- Regularly assess clients and staff for [symptoms](#).
 - Clients who have symptoms may or may not have COVID-19. Make sure they have a place they can safely stay within the shelter or at an alternate site in coordination with local health authorities.
 - An on-site nurse or other clinical staff can help with clinical assessments.
 - Provide anyone who presents with symptoms with a cloth face covering.
 - Facilitate access to non-urgent medical care as needed.
 - Use standard facility procedures to determine whether a client needs immediate medical attention. Emergency signs include:
 - Trouble breathing
 - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
 - New confusion or inability to arouse
 - Bluish lips or face
 - Notify the designated medical facility and personnel to transfer clients that the client might have COVID-19.

- Prepare [healthcare clinic staff](#) to care for patients with COVID-19, if your facility provides healthcare services, and make sure your facility has supply of [personal protective equipment](#).
- Provide links to respite (temporary) care for clients who were hospitalized with COVID-19 but have been discharged.
 - Some of these clients will still require isolation to prevent transmission.
 - Some of these clients will no longer require isolation and can use normal facility resources.
- Make sure bathrooms and other sinks are consistently stocked with soap and drying materials for handwashing. Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol at key points within the facility, including registration desks, entrances/exits, and eating areas.
- [Cloth face coverings](#) used by clients and staff should be [laundered regularly](#). Staff involved in laundering client face coverings should do the following:
 - Face coverings should be collected in a sealable container (like a trash bag).
 - Staff should wear disposable gloves and a face mask. Use of a disposable gown is also recommended, if available.
 - Gloves should be [properly](#) removed and disposed of after laundering face coverings; clean hands immediately after removal of gloves by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects between use using an [EPA- registered disinfectant](#).

COVID-19 Readiness Resources

- Visit www.cdc.gov/COVID19 for the latest information and resources
- [Printable Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Guidance Related to Unsheltered Homelessness](#)
- [Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [ASPR TRACIE Homeless Shelter Resources for COVID-19](#)

A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH



A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada: A Human Rights Approach

Homeless encampments threaten many human rights, including most directly the right to housing. People living in encampments face profound challenges with respect to their health, security, and wellbeing, and encampment conditions typically fall far below international human rights standards. Residents are frequently subject to criminalization, harassment, violence, and discriminatory treatment. Encampments are thus instances of both human rights *violations* of those who are forced to rely on them for their homes, as well as human rights *claims*, advanced in response to violations of the right to housing.

Ultimately, encampments are a reflection of Canadian governments' failure to successfully implement the right to adequate housing.

As encampments increasingly emerge across Canada, there is an urgent need for governments to interact with them in a manner that upholds human rights. This Protocol, developed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing and her lead researcher, Kaitlin Schwan, with the input of many experts, outlines eight Principles to guide governments and other stakeholders in adopting a rights-based response to encampments. While encampments are not a solution to homelessness, it is critical that governments uphold the basic human rights and dignity of encampment residents while they wait for adequate, affordable housing solutions that meet their needs. The Principles outlined in this Protocol are based in international human rights law, and the recognition that encampment residents are rights holders and experts in their own lives. The Protocol is intended to assist governments in realizing the right to adequate housing for this group.

PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Recognize residents of homeless encampments as rights holders

All government action with respect to homeless encampments must be guided by a commitment to upholding the human rights and human dignity of their residents. This means a shift away from criminalizing, penalizing, or obstructing homeless encampments, to an approach rooted in rights-based participation and accountability.

Principle 2: Meaningful engagement and effective participation of homeless encampment residents

Residents are entitled to meaningful participation in the design and implementation of policies, programs, and practices that affect them. Ensuring meaningful participation is central to respecting residents' autonomy, dignity, agency, and self-determination. Engagement should begin early, be ongoing, and proceed under the principle that residents are experts in their own lives. The views expressed by residents of homeless encampments

must be afforded adequate and due consideration in all decision-making processes. The right to participate requires that all residents be provided with information, resources, and opportunities to directly influence decisions that affect them.

Principle 3: Prohibit forced evictions of homeless encampments

International human rights law does not permit governments to destroy peoples' homes, even if those homes are made of improvised materials and established without legal authority. Governments may not remove residents from encampments without meaningfully engaging with them and identifying alternative places to live that are acceptable to them. Any such removal from their homes or from the land which they occupy, without the provision of appropriate forms of legal protection, is defined as a 'forced eviction' and is considered a gross violation of human rights. The removal of residents' private property without their knowledge and consent is also strictly prohibited.

Common reasons used to justify evictions of encampments, such as 'public interest,' 'city beautification', development or re-development, or at the behest of private actors (e.g., real estate firms), do not justify forced evictions.¹

Principle 4: Explore all viable alternatives to eviction

Governments must explore all viable alternatives to eviction, ensuring the meaningful and effective participation of residents in discussions regarding the future of the encampment. Meaningful consultation should seek to maximize participation and should be supported by access to free and independent legal advice. Where personal needs differ amongst residents of encampments such that a singular best alternative is not unanimous, governments will have to develop several solutions each of which is consistent with the principles outlined in this Protocol.

Principle 5: Ensure that relocation is human rights compliant

Considerations regarding relocation must be grounded in the principle that "the right to remain in one's home and community is central to the right to housing."² Meaningful, robust, and ongoing engagement with residents is required for any decisions regarding relocation. Governments must adhere to the right to housing and other human rights standards when relocation is necessary or preferred by residents. In such cases, adequate alternative housing, with all necessary amenities, must be provided to all residents prior to any eviction. Relocation must not result in the continuation or exacerbation of homelessness, or require the fracturing of families or partnerships.

Principle 6: Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights

Canadian governments must ensure, at a minimum, that basic adequacy standards are ensured in homeless encampments while adequate housing options are negotiated and

¹ A/HRC/43/43, para 36.

² A/73/310/Rev.1, para 26.

secured. Governments' compliance with international human rights law requires: (1) access to safe and clean drinking water, (2) access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, (3) resources and support to ensure fire safety, (4) waste management systems, (4) social supports and services, and guarantee of personal safety of residents, (5) facilities and resources that support food safety, (6) resources to support harm reduction, and (7) rodent and pest prevention.

Principle 7: Ensure human rights-based goals and outcomes, and the preservation of dignity for homeless encampment residents

Governments have an obligation to bring about positive human rights outcomes in all of their activities and decisions concerning homeless encampments. This means that Canadian governments must move, on a priority basis, towards the full enjoyment of the right to housing for encampment residents. Any decision that does not lead to the furthering of inhabitants' human rights, that does not ensure their dignity, or that represents a backwards step in terms of their enjoyment of human rights, is contrary to human rights law.

Principle 8: Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples in all engagements with homeless encampments

Governments' engagement with Indigenous Peoples in homeless encampments must be guided by the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil their distinct rights. This begins with recognition of the distinct relationship that Indigenous Peoples have to their lands and territories, and their right to construct shelter in ways that are culturally, historically, and spiritually significant. Governments must meaningfully consult with Indigenous encampment residents concerning any decisions that affects them, recognizing their right to self-determination and self-governance. International human rights law strictly forbids the forced eviction, displacement, and relocation of Indigenous Peoples in the absence of free, prior, and informed consent.

Given the disproportionate violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples, governments have an urgent obligation to protect these groups against all forms of violence and discrimination within homeless encampments, in a manner that is consistent with Indigenous self-determination and self-governance.

A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada: A Human Rights Approach

I. Introduction

1 In the face of escalating homelessness and housing affordability crises, many cities across Canada have seen a rise in homeless encampments. In various Canadian communities, people experiencing homelessness have turned to living in s, vehicles, or other forms of rudimentary or informal shelter as a means to survive.³ While they vary in size and structure, the term '*encampment*' is used to refer to any area wherein an individual or a group of people live in homelessness together, often in tents or other temporary structures (also referred to as *homeless camps*, *tent cities*, *homeless settlements* or *informal settlements*).

2 Homeless encampments in Canada must be understood in relation to the global housing crisis and the deepening of housing unaffordability across the country. Encampments must also be understood in the context of historical and ongoing structural racism and colonization in Canada, whereby Indigenous peoples have been systemically discriminated against and dispossessed of their lands, properties, and legal systems. Other groups have also endured systemic and historical disadvantage that has created barriers to accessing housing and shelters, including 2SLGBTQ+, Black and other racialized communities, people living with disabilities, and people who are criminalized. While encampments are often framed and discussed as matters of individual poverty or deficiency, they are the result of structural conditions and the failure of governments to implement the right to housing or to engage with reconciliation and decolonization materially and in good faith.

3 Homeless encampments threaten many human rights, including most specifically the right to housing. In international human rights law, homelessness - which includes those residing in encampments - is a prima facie violation of the right to adequate housing.⁴ This means that governments have a positive obligation to implement an urgent housing-focused response, ensuring that residents have access to adequate housing in the shortest possible time and, in the interim, that their human rights are fully respected.

4 Government responses to homeless encampments often fail to employ a rights-based approach. Residents of encampments are frequently the victims of abuse, harassment, violence, and forced evictions or 'sweeps.' In many cases, the issues

³ Encampments have arisen in cities across the country, including: Abbotsford, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Gatineau, Peterborough, Winnipeg, Montreal, Nanaimo, Calgary, Saskatoon, Fredericton, Moncton, Oshawa, Halifax, and Maple Ridge.

⁴ A/HRC/31/54, para. 4.

associated with encampments are within the jurisdiction and responsibility of municipal authorities, including through bylaws specific to policing, fire and safety, sanitation, and social services. This has led to a pattern whereby municipal governments deploy bylaws, local police, and zoning policies that displace people in encampments, in turn compromising the physical and psychological health of people who have no place else to go and who rely on encampments to survive, absent accessible alternatives.⁵

5 Provincial, territorial, and federal governments have historically left engagement with encampments to city officials, who receive little (if any) guidance and support. Municipal authorities are often unaware of their legal obligations under international human rights law, including with respect to the duty to ensure the dignity and security of encampment residents.⁶ Further, accountability mechanisms with respect to the right to housing remain weak in Canada, meaning that people living in encampments have limited avenues through which to claim this right.

6 Ensuring a human rights-based response to homeless encampments should be a key concern for every Canadian city, and all governments should employ a human rights-based framework to guide their engagement with encampment residents.

II. Purpose of the National Protocol on Homeless Encampments

7 The purpose of this document is to provide all levels of government with an understanding of their human rights obligations with respect to homeless encampments, highlighting what is and is not permissible under international human rights law. This Protocol outlines 8 broad human rights-based Principles that must guide state⁷ action in response to homeless encampments of all kinds.

8 This Protocol does not attempt to foresee every possible context or challenge that may arise within encampments. Governments and relevant stakeholders must apply human rights principles as described in the Protocol to each case as it arises, endeavouring at all times to recognize and respect the inherent rights, dignity, and inclusion of encampment residents.

9 This Protocol has been developed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing in consultation with a range of experts from across Canada, including those

⁵ *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz* (2016 BCSC 2437). Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc2437/2016bcsc2437.html?resultIndex=1>

⁶ A/HRC/43/43, para 7.

⁷ 'State' refers to all levels and branches of government and anyone exercising government authority.

with lived expertise of homelessness, urban Indigenous leaders, community advocates, researchers, lawyers, and experts in human rights law.⁸

III. Encampments in Canada in the context of the Human Right to Adequate Housing

10 Under international human rights law, everyone has the right to adequate housing as an element of the right to an adequate standard of living.⁹ This requires States to ensure that housing is accessible, affordable, habitable, in a suitable location, culturally adequate, offers security of tenure, and is proximate to essential services such as health care and education.¹⁰ The right to adequate housing includes the right to be protected from: arbitrary or unlawful interference with an individual's privacy, family, and home; any forced eviction (regardless of legal title or tenure status); and from discrimination of any kind.¹¹

11 Homelessness constitutes a prima facie violation of the right to housing. It is a profound assault on a person's dignity, security, and social inclusion. Homelessness violates not only the right to housing, but often, depending on circumstances, violates a number of other human rights, including: non-discrimination; health; water and sanitation; freedom from cruel, degrading, and inhuman treatment; and the rights to life, liberty, and security of the person.¹²

12 Encampments constitute a form of homelessness, and thus are a reflection of the violation of residents' right to adequate housing. People living in encampments typically face a range of human rights violations and profound challenges with respect to their health, security, and wellbeing. Encampment conditions typically fall far below international human rights standards on a variety of fronts, often lacking even the most

⁸ This Protocol was prepared by: Leilani Farha and Kaitlin Schwan with the assistance of Bruce Porter, Vanessa Poirier, and Sam Freeman. Reviewers include, among others: Margaret Pfoh (Aboriginal Housing Management Association), Cathy Crowe (Shelter and Housing Justice Network), Greg Cook (Sanctuary Toronto), Tim Richter (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness), Anna Cooper (Pivot Legal Society), Caitlin Shane (Pivot Legal Society), Emily Paradis (University of Toronto), Emma Stromberg (Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres), and Erin Dej (Wilfred Laurier University).

⁹ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee's General Comments No. 4 (1991) on the right to adequate housing and No. 7 (1997) on forced evictions.

¹⁰ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee's General Comment No. 4 (1991) on the right to adequate housing. At the domestic level, adequate housing and core housing need is defined in relation to three housing standards: adequacy, affordability, and suitability. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation [defines](#) these housing standards in the following ways: "(1) [Adequate](#) housing are reported by their residents as not requiring any major repairs; (2) [Affordable](#) dwellings cost less than 30% of total before-tax household income; and (3) [Suitable](#) housing has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of resident households, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements."

¹¹ A/HRC/43/43.

¹² A/HRC/31/54; A/HRC/40/61, para 43.

basic services like toilets.¹³ Residents of encampments are also frequently subject to criminalization, harassment, violence, and discriminatory treatment.¹⁴

13 In the face of poverty and deep marginalization, people without homes face many untenable choices. For example, they may be forced to choose between ‘sleeping rough’ on their own (putting themselves at risk of violence and criminalization), entering an emergency homeless shelter (which may be inaccessible or inappropriate for their needs, or in which their autonomy, dignity, self-reliance, and/or independence may be undermined), or residing in a homeless encampment (in which they may lack access to basic services and face threats to their health). These choices are further narrowed for those living in communities that lack any emergency shelters, or where existing shelters are at (or over) capacity.

14 For people without access to adequate housing, the availability, accessibility, appropriateness, and adequacy of shelters plays a significant role in determining whether or not a person chooses to reside in a homeless encampment. In some cities, emergency shelters operate at 95-100% capacity,¹⁵ necessitating that some individuals sleep rough or reside in an encampment. Existing shelters may also not be low-barrier, wheelchair accessible, trans-inclusive, or safe for people experiencing complex trauma or other challenges. Homeless persons with mental health challenges, drug or alcohol dependencies, or pets may find themselves barred from shelters. Under such conditions, some individuals may prefer, or feel they have little choice but to, reside in an encampment. Encampments thus may become a necessity or the best option available for some of those the most marginalized people in Canadian society.

15 For Indigenous peoples, a desire to avoid state surveillance and a mistrust of institutional settings, including shelters, may be a factor in turning to or living in an encampment. Negative or harmful interactions with colonial institutions, such as residential schools, the child welfare system, corrections, hospitals, asylums or sanitoriums, and shelters, may be intergenerational in nature and highly traumatic. For these reasons and others, Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in homeless populations across Canada, and further to this, are more likely to be part of “outdoor” or “unsheltered” populations – including homeless encampments.¹⁶

¹³ See Cooper, A. (2020). *Why People Without Housing Still Need Heat*. Pivot Legal Society. Available from: http://www.pivotlegal.org/why_people_without_housing_still_need_heat

¹⁴ A/HRC/43/43, para 31; see also *Homelessness, Victimization and Crime: Knowledge and Actionable Recommendations*. Available from: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn35305-eng.pdf>

¹⁵ Employment and Social Development Canada. (2018). *Shelter Capacity Report 2018*. Ottawa. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/publications-bulletins/shelter-capacity-2018.html>

¹⁶ See Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. (2020). *Indigenous Homelessness in the 20 Largest Cities in Canada*. Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Canada.

16 Regardless of the reasons why a person resides in a homeless encampment, homeless encampments *do not* constitute adequate housing, and do not discharge governments of their positive obligation to ensure the realization of the right to adequate housing for all people. Under international human rights law, “States have an obligation to take steps to the maximum of their available resources with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right to adequate housing, by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures.”¹⁷ As part of these obligations, States must prioritize marginalized individuals or groups living in precarious housing conditions - including residents of homeless encampments.¹⁸

17 Governments have an urgent, positive obligation to provide or otherwise ensure access to adequate housing - for residents of encampments as they do for all people experiencing homelessness. Governments must act to immediately pursue deliberate, concrete, and targeted efforts to end homelessness by ensuring access to adequate housing. In the interim, governments must ensure the availability of sufficient shelter spaces - accessible and appropriate for diverse needs - where dignity, autonomy, and self-determination are upheld.

18 The fact that encampments violate the right to housing does not in any way absolve governments of their obligations to uphold the basic human rights and dignity of encampment residents while they wait for adequate, affordable housing solutions that meet their needs. The Principles outlined in this Protocol seek to support governments and other stakeholders to ensure that their engagements with encampments are rights-based and recognize residents as rights holders, with a view to realizing the right to adequate housing for these groups while respecting their dignity, autonomy, individual circumstances, and personal choices.

19 International human rights law does not permit government to use force to destroy peoples’ homes, even if they are made of canvas or improvised from available materials and constructed without legal authority or title. States may not remove residents from encampments without meaningfully engaging them to identify alternative places to live that are acceptable to them. Any such removal from their homes or from the land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection, consistent with international human rights law is defined as a ‘forced eviction’ and is considered a gross violation of human rights.

20 Unfortunately, such forced evictions or sweeps have become common in Canada. Evictions have contravened international law by being carried out without meaningful consultation with communities and without measures to ensure that those affected have access to alternative housing. They have been justified on the basis that the

¹⁷ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 2 (1).

¹⁸ A/HRC/43/4.

residents are there illegally, are at risk to themselves, are on land that is slated for development, or are obstructing the enjoyment of the community by others. Declining conditions at encampments and public health and safety concerns are also frequently the grounds on which local governments and provinces seek injunctions for removal. The impact of municipalities' failure to proactively provide resources and services to mitigate or improve those conditions and concerns is most often ignored. Some communities have engaged bylaw officers or local police to tear down encampments at first sight.¹⁹

21 None of these reasons, however, justify forced evictions under international law. Forced evictions often have harmful or disastrous consequences for encampment residents.²⁰ Victims may face life-threatening situations that compromise their health and security, or result in the loss of access to food, social supports, social and medical services, and other resources.²¹

22 Few governments have recognized encampments as a response to violations of fundamental human rights and a response to the isolation and indignity of homelessness. They have failed to treat those living in such encampments as legally entitled to the protection of their homes and their dignity.

IV. Relevant Authority

23 Canadian governments' responsibilities and relevant authority to ensure the right to adequate housing, including for people residing in encampments, is found in: (1) international human rights treaties, (2) the *National Right to Housing Act*, (3) the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and human rights legislation, and (4) the UN *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (The Sustainable Development Goals)*.

1. International Human Rights Treaties

24 Canada has ratified multiple international human rights treaties that articulate the right to adequate housing. In 1976, Canada ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which contains the chief articulation of the right to housing under Article 11.1 "the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for [themselves] and [their] family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to

¹⁹ Ball, V. (2019). *Encampment residents fear eviction*. The Expositor. Available from: <https://www.brantfordexpositor.ca/news/local-news/encampment-residents-fear-eviction>

²⁰ A/HRC/43/43, para 36.

²¹ UN Office of the High Commissioner. (2014). *Forced Evictions: Fact Sheet No. 25/Rev.1*. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS25.Rev.1.pdf>; Collinson, R. & Reed, D. (2018). *The Effects of Eviction on Low-Income Households*. Available from: https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/evictions_collinson_reed.pdf

the continuous improvement of living conditions.”²² The right to housing and the prohibition against forced evictions has been interpreted in General Comments No. 4 and 7²³ by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In addition, Canada has ratified other treaties that codify the right to adequate housing, including:

- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
- *Convention on the Rights of the Child*
- *Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*
- *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*

25 Human rights ratified by Canada “extend to all parts of federal States without any limitations or exceptions,” thus federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments are equally bound by these obligations.²⁴ In interpreting the right to adequate housing, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasized that “the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one’s head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.”²⁵

26 Canada has also formally recognized the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which also codifies the right to adequate housing and affirms that Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining housing programmes and policies that affect them.²⁶ Further, Indigenous Peoples’ right to land and self-determination is indivisible from the right to housing under international human rights law, meaning that they “shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories and that no relocation shall take place without their free, prior and informed consent.”²⁷ All encampments are located on the traditional territories of Indigenous nations, including in cities, towns, and rural areas. On these territories, Indigenous Peoples’ right to land and self-determination is in effect, whether or not those lands are subject to land claims or treaty.

1. Canadian Housing Policy and Legislation

27 The right to housing has also recently been recognized in Canadian legislation. In June 2019, the *National Housing Strategy Act* (the *Act*) received royal assent in Canada. The *Act* affirms Canada’s recognition of the right to housing as a fundamental human

²² ICESCR, Article 11, masculine pronouns corrected.

²³ General Comment 4 (1991), UN Doc. E/1992/23; General Comment 7 (1997), UN Doc. E/1998/22.

²⁴ A/69/274.

²⁵ General Comment 4 (1991), para 7.

²⁶ A/74/183.

²⁷ A/74/183.

right and commits to further its progressive realization as defined under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

28 The Preamble and Section 4 of the *Act* underscore the interdependence of the right to housing with other fundamental rights, such as the right to life and an adequate standard of health and socio-economic wellbeing. Specifically, Section 4 states:

It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to:

- (a) recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law;
- (b) recognize that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities;
- (c) support improved housing outcomes for the people of Canada; and
- (d) further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2. The Canadian Charter and Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Legislation

29 The government of Canada's international human rights obligations must be considered by courts in Canada when determining the rights of residents of encampments under domestic law,²⁸ particularly the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.²⁹ The Supreme Court has recognized that the right to "life, liberty and security of the person" in section 7 of the *Charter* may be interpreted to include the right to housing under international law.³⁰ Canada has told the UN that it accepts that section 7 at least ensures access to basic necessities of life and personal security.³¹

²⁸ It should be noted that a human rights-based approach under domestic law should entail mindfulness about core human rights and equality principles, such as substantive equality and non-discrimination, which recognizes that state interventions be particularly attuned to the specific needs of particular groups, including those impacted by systemic and historical disadvantage. In this regard, a 'one size fits all' approach may not fully capture the distinct needs of groups residing within encampments.

²⁹ *R. v. Hape*, [2007] 2 S.C.R. 292, 2007 SCC 26, para 56: "In interpreting the scope of application of the Charter, the courts should seek to ensure compliance with Canada's binding obligations under international law where the express words are capable of supporting such a construction."

³⁰ *Irwin Toy Ltd. v. Quebec (Attorney General)*, [1989] 1 S.C.R. 927; See Martha Jackman and Bruce Porter, "[Social and Economic Rights](#)", in Peter Oliver, Patrick Maklem & Nathalie DesRosiers, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Canadian Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 843-861.

³¹ Canada's commitments are described in *Victoria (City) v. Adams*, 2008 BCSC 1363 (CanLII), paras 98-99. Online, <http://canlii.ca/t/215hs>

30 In Canada, courts have considered the human rights implications of encampments, and have emphasized that Section 7 life and security of the person interests are engaged where state action poses significant harm to the health and wellbeing of persons enduring homelessness and housing insecurity. For example, Canadian courts have recognized that the daily displacement of people experiencing homelessness causes physical and psychological harm. The Court accepted in the case of *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz*, that "the result of repeated displacement often leads to the migration of homeless individuals towards more remote, isolated locations as a means to avoid detection. This not only makes supporting people more challenging, but also results in adverse health and safety risks." The court recognized that these health and safety risks include "impaired sleep and serious psychological pain and stress."³²

31 In the case of *Victoria v. Adams*,³³ residents of an encampment challenged a bylaw that prevented them from constructing temporary shelter in a park, on the basis of which city officials had secured an injunction to evict them. The British Columbia Supreme Court agreed that while the *Charter* does not explicitly recognize the right to housing, international law is a persuasive source for *Charter* interpretation and found that the bylaw violated the residents' right to security of the person. The BC Court of Appeal upheld the decision of the BC Supreme Court and other decisions in British Columbia have followed.³⁴ In *British Columbia v. Adamson* 2016,³⁵ for example, the court found that in the absence of alternative shelter or housing for all people experiencing homelessness, encampment residents must not be evicted from their encampment. In *Abbotsford v. Shantz* 2015³⁶ the Court found that denying encampment residents space to erect temporary shelters on public property was "grossly disproportionate to any benefit that the City might derive from furthering its objectives and breaches the s. 7 *Charter* rights of the City's homeless."³⁷

32 The right to equality is also protected under the Canadian Charter as well as under federal, provincial, and territorial human rights legislation. Not all levels of government interpret or administer human rights codes in the same manner, with each province and territory administering its own human rights codes.³⁸ Regardless of jurisdiction, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated that the right to

³² *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz*, 2015 BCSC 1909, paras 213 and 219.

³³ *Victoria (City) v. Adams*, 2008 BCSC 1363 (CanLII), paras 85-100. Online, <http://canlii.ca/t/215hs>

³⁴ Key examples of case law includes: *Victoria v. Adams* 2008/ 2009, *Abbotsford v. Shantz* 2015, *BC v. Adamson* 2016, and *Vancouver (City) v. Wallstam* 2017.

³⁵ *British Columbia v. Adamson* (2016 BCSC 1245). Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc1245/2016bcsc1245.html?resultIndex=1>

³⁶ *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz* (2016 BCSC 2437). Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc2437/2016bcsc2437.html?resultIndex=1>

³⁷ *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz* (2016 BCSC 2437), para 224. Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc2437/2016bcsc2437.html?resultIndex=1>

³⁸ For an overview of provincial and territorial human rights codes, see: <https://ccdi.ca/media/1414/20171102-publications-overview-of-hr-codes-by-province-final-en.pdf>

equality should be interpreted to provide the widest possible protection of the right to housing and has urged Canadian courts and governments to adopt such interpretations.³⁹

33 While it is clear that the *Charter* provides some protection from forced evictions and sweeps of encampment residents, the extent to which it requires governments to address the crisis of homelessness that has led to reliance on encampments remains unresolved. The Supreme Court of Canada has yet to agree to hear an appeal in a case that would clarify the obligations of governments to address homelessness as a human rights violation. The Supreme Court has, however, been clear that the *Charter* should, where possible, be interpreted to provide protection of rights that are guaranteed under international human rights law ratified by Canada.

34 Governments should not use uncertainty about what courts might rule as an excuse for violating the human rights of those who are homeless. Canadian governments have an obligation, under international human rights law, to promote and adopt interpretations of domestic law consistent with the right to adequate housing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has expressed concern that governments in Canada continue to argue in court against interpretations of the *Canadian Charter* that would protect the rights of homeless persons and residents of homeless encampments.

35 Therefore, it is critically important that, as part of a Protocol based on respect for human rights, municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal governments instruct their lawyers not to undermine international human rights or oppose reasonable interpretations of the *Charter* based on international human rights. They should never seek to undermine the equal rights of residents of homeless encampments to a dignified life, to liberty, and security of the person.

3. UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

36 In September 2015, member states of the United Nations, including Canada, adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)*. Target 11.1 of the SDGs specifically identifies that by 2030, all States must “ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and to upgrade informal settlements.” This means governments must take steps to eliminate homelessness and make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Upgrading informal settlements

³⁹ CESCR, General Comment No. 9, para 15; E/C.12/1993/5, paras 4, 5, and 30.

includes the upgrading of homeless encampments.⁴⁰ States have affirmed that a rights-based approach to the SDG's is critical if they are to be achieved.⁴¹

V. Key Principles

37 It is critical that all levels of government in Canada employ an integrated human rights-based approach when engaging with encampments. The Principles outlined here aim to support the right to housing for all encampment residents as part of Canada's commitment to the right to housing under international human rights treaties and domestic law.

PRINCIPLE 1: Recognize residents of homeless encampments as rights holders

38 All government action with respect to homeless encampments must be guided by a commitment to upholding the human rights and human dignity of their residents. For many governments and those exercising governmental authority, this will mean a shift away from criminalizing, penalizing, or obstructing encampments, to an approach rooted in rights-based participation and accountability.⁴²

39 This will mean understanding encampments as instances of both human rights *violations* of those who are forced to rely on them for their homes, as well as human rights *claims* advanced in response to violations of the right to housing. While encampments arise as a result of governments failing to effectively implement the right to housing, they can also be an expression of individuals and communities claiming their legitimate place within cities, finding homes within communities of people without housing, asserting claims to lands and territories, and refusing to be made invisible. They are a form of grassroots human rights practice critical to a democracy such as Canada's.⁴³ For Indigenous peoples, the occupation of lands and traditional territories vis-à-vis encampments may also be an assertion of land rights, claimed in conjunction with the right to housing.

40 In recognition of encampments as rights violations and rights claims, governments must rectify the policy failures that underpin the emergence of homeless encampments, while simultaneously recognizing residents as rights holders who are advancing a legitimate human rights claim. Their efforts to claim their rights to home

⁴⁰ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁴¹ The *National Housing Strategy* of Canada mirrors many of the commitments made in the *2030 Agenda*. However, the *Strategy* only commits Canada to reducing chronic homelessness by 50%, despite the *2030 Agenda's* imperative to eliminate homelessness and provide access to adequate housing for all.

⁴² A/73/310/Rev.1, para 15.

⁴³ A/73/310/Rev.1.

and community must be supported, not thwarted, criminalized, or dismissed as illegitimate or gratuitous protest.⁴⁴

PRINCIPLE 2: Meaningful engagement and effective participation of encampment residents

41 Ensuring encampment residents are able to participate in decisions that directly affect them is “critical to dignity, the exercise of agency, autonomy and self-determination.”⁴⁵ As rights holders, encampment residents are entitled to “participate actively, freely and meaningfully in the design and implementation of programmes and policies affecting them.”⁴⁶ Meaningful engagement must be grounded in recognition of the inherent dignity of encampment residents and their human rights, with the views expressed by residents of homeless encampments being afforded adequate and due consideration in all decision-making processes.

42 Governments and other actors must engage encampment residents in the early stages of discussion without using the threat of eviction procedures or police enforcement to coerce, intimidate, or harass.⁴⁷ Engagement should proceed under the principle that residents are experts in their own lives and what is required for a dignified life.⁴⁸ Indigenous residents of encampments should also be engaged in decision-making processes in a manner that is culturally-safe and trauma informed.

43 In the context of homeless encampments, the right to participate requires that all residents be provided with information, resources, and opportunities to directly influence decisions that affect them. All meetings with government officials or their representatives regarding the encampment should be documented and made available to encampment residents upon request.

44 Participation processes must comply with all human rights principles, including non-discrimination. Compliance with international human rights law requires:

- i. **Provision of necessary institutional, financial, and other resources to support residents’ right to participate**
In order to participate in decisions that affect them, encampment residents should be provided with financial and institutional resources (e.g., wifi/internet access, meeting spaces) that support their active participation in decision-making. Such supports should include, but are not

⁴⁴ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁴⁵ A/HRC/43/43, para 20.

⁴⁶ Ibid. See also the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations.

⁴⁷ A/HRC/40/61, para 38.

⁴⁸ A/HRC/43/43, para 21.

limited to: legal advice, social service supports, Indigenous cultural supports, literacy supports, translation, mobility supports, and transportation costs to attend consultations or meetings.⁴⁹ These resources should support democratic processes within the encampment, including community meetings, the appointment of community leaders, and the sharing of information.⁵⁰ Residents must be granted a reasonable and sufficient amount of time to consult on decisions that affect them.

ii. **Provision of relevant information about the right to housing**

Encampment residents must be provided with information about their right to housing, including information about procedures through which they can hold governments and other actors accountable, as well as specific information about the rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁵¹

iii. **Provision of relevant information concerning decisions that affect residents, ensuring sufficient time to consult**

Encampment residents must be provided with all relevant information in order to make decisions in matters that affect them.⁵²

iv. **Establishment of community engagement agreement between homeless encampment residents, government actors, and other stakeholders**

In order to facilitate respectful, cooperative, and non-coercive communication between residents, government, and other stakeholders, government may seek to collaborate with residents to create a formal community engagement agreement (when appropriate and requested by residents).⁵³ This agreement should outline when and how encampment residents will be engaged,⁵⁴ and should be ongoing and responsive to the needs of the encampment residents.⁵⁵ It should allow the residents of homeless encampments to play an active role in all aspects of relevant proposals and policy, from commencement to conclusion. Residents should be able to challenge any decision made by government or other actors, to propose alternatives, and to articulate their own demands and priorities. Third party mediators should be available to protect against power imbalances that may lead to breakdown in negotiations or create

⁴⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' General Comment No. 4, para. 12, and the basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement (A/HRC/4/18, annex I, para. 39).

⁵⁰ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁵¹ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 19.

⁵² A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁵³ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁵⁴ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁵⁵ United Nations. *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, foundational principles, para 38.

unfair results.⁵⁶ Relevant government authorities and professionals should also be provided with “training in community engagement and accountability.”⁵⁷

v. **Provision of equitable opportunities for the meaningful participation of all encampment residents**

As a matter of human rights law, particular efforts must be taken to ensure equitable participation by women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and other groups who experience discrimination or marginalization.⁵⁸ Where possible, members of these groups should be afforded central roles in the process.⁵⁹

Principle 2 in Action – The “People’s Process” in Kabul, Afghanistan

The upgrading of informal settlements was identified as a key goal in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, committing States to “upgrade slums” by 2030 (target 11.1). As identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, “Participation in upgrading requires democratic processes through which the community can make collective decisions.” Under international human rights law, the democratic processes required to upgrade slums mirrors encampment residents’ right to participate in plans to resolve their housing needs. As such, democratic processes implemented to upgrade informal settlements in cities around the world can provide helpful examples for Canadian homeless encampments.

One such example is the “people’s process” in Kabul, Afghanistan. This process delineates community leadership and control over the upgrading process, and includes an organizational structure that enables the community to engage different levels of government. As part of this process, “local residents elect community development councils responsible for the selection, design, implementation and maintenance of the projects.” City staff are trained to work alongside informal settlement residents to implement and complete upgrading.

⁵⁶ A/HRC/43/4, para 42.

⁵⁷ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 20.

⁵⁸ A/HRC/43/4.

⁵⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 21 (2009) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, in particular para 16.

PRINCIPLE 3: Prohibition of forced evictions of encampments

45 Under international human rights law, forced evictions constitute a gross violation of human rights and are prohibited in all circumstances, including in the context of encampments.⁶⁰

46 Forced evictions are defined as “the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection ... in conformity with the provisions of the International Covenants on Human Rights.”⁶¹

47 Forced evictions are impermissible irrespective of the tenure status of those affected. This means that the forced eviction of encampments is prohibited if appropriate forms of protection are not provided – including all of the requirements described in this Protocol.⁶² It may also be considered a forced eviction when governments’ and those acting on their behalf harass, intimidate, or threaten encampment residents, causing residents to vacate the property.⁶³

48 Common reasons used to justify evictions of encampments, such as ‘public interest,’ ‘city beautification,’ development or re-development, or at the behest of private actors (e.g., real estate firms), do not justify forced evictions.⁶⁴ Evictions (as opposed to “forced evictions”) may be justified in rare circumstances, but they may only be carried out after exploring all viable alternatives with residents, in accordance with law and consistent with the right to housing, as described in this Protocol.

49 Governments must repeal any laws or policies that sanction forced evictions and must refrain from adopting any such laws, including for example anti-camping laws, move-along laws, laws prohibiting tents being erected overnight, laws prohibiting personal belongings on the street, and other laws that penalize and punish people experiencing homelessness and residing in encampments.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ A/HRC/43/43, para 34; CESCR General Comment No.7.

⁶¹ CESCR General Comment No.7.

⁶² A/HRC/43/43, para 34; also see: “Security of tenure under domestic law should not, consequently, be restricted to those with formal title or contractual rights to their land or housing. The UN guiding principles on security of tenure (A/HRC/25/54, para. 5), states that security of tenure should be understood broadly as “a set of relationships with respect to housing and land, established through statutory or customary law or informal or hybrid arrangements, that enables one to live in one’s home in security, peace and dignity.”

⁶³ UN Office of the High Commissioner. (2014). *Forced Evictions: Fact Sheet No. 25/Rev.1*. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS25.Rev.1.pdf>

⁶⁴ A/HRC/43/43, para 36.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Ontario’s *Safe Street’s Act* (1999).

Principle 3 in Action: Forced Eviction & Harassment of Homeless Encampment Residents

In cities around the world, people experiencing homelessness are frequently subject to discriminatory treatment, harassment, and extreme forms of violence because of their housing status. People residing in homeless encampments are exposed to similar or worse treatment, particularly when faced with pressure to relocate or disperse.

In some cases, local laws, policies, or practices can provide the mechanisms for this harassment. For example, in British Columbia local authorities enforced a bylaw prohibiting overnight shelters in parks by using tactics that included spreading chicken manure and fish fertilizer on a homeless encampment. Residents and allies of the homeless encampment subsequently filed a human rights complaint with regard to these practices (*Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz*), and the BC Supreme Court found that certain bylaws violated encampment residents' constitutional rights to life, liberty and security of the person.

Under international human rights law, such activities are strictly prohibited and constitute instances of forced eviction, even if they align with local laws or policies. Given this, it is critical that Canadian governments review local and national policies and laws to ensure they do not violate the prohibition against the forced eviction of homeless encampments.

PRINCIPLE 4: Explore all viable alternatives to eviction

50 Government authorities must explore all viable alternatives to eviction, in consultation with encampment residents.⁶⁶ This means ensuring their meaningful and effective participation in discussions regarding the future of the encampment.

51 Free and independent legal advice should be made available to all residents to help them understand the options, processes, and their rights. Consultations should be conducted at times and locations that are appropriate and accessible for residents to ensure their participation is maximised. Financial and other support should be available to residents so that they can fully participate in all discussions regarding the future of the encampment and so that residents can retain outside consultants (e.g., environmental engineers, architects) where needed to assist them in developing alternative options to eviction.

52 Discussions regarding viable alternatives to eviction must include meaningfully engagement with Indigenous Peoples and be grounded in principles of self-determination, free, prior and informed consent. In urban contexts, for example, urban Indigenous organisations should be engaged early in the planning process to establish service delivery roles and to ensure the availability of culturally appropriate services.

⁶⁶ A/HRC/43/4.

53 Where personal needs differ amongst residents of encampments such that a singular best alternative is not unanimous, governments will have to develop several solutions each of which is consistent with the principles outlined in this Protocol.

PRINCIPLE 5: Ensure that any relocation is human rights compliant

54 Homeless encampments are not a solution to homelessness, nor are they a form of adequate housing. Governments have an urgent, positive obligation to ensure encampment residents have access to long-term, adequate housing that meets their needs, accompanied by necessary supports. Rather than eviction, governments must engage with homeless encampments with a view to ensuring residents are able to access such housing.

55 Despite this obligation, many governments respond to encampments by simply moving residents from one bad site to another through the use of law enforcement, physical barriers, or other means, and without meaningfully engaging residents. This in no way addresses the underlying violations of the right to housing experienced by residents of encampments, is often costly, and can contribute to increased marginalization. If relocation is deemed necessary and/or desired by encampment residents, it is critical that it is conducted in a human rights compliant manner.

56 As a starting point, meaningful, robust, and ongoing engagement with residents (as defined in Principle 2) is required for the development of any relocation of homeless encampments or of their residents. Meaningful engagement with communities should ensure the development of plans that respect the rights of residents and can be implemented cooperatively, without police enforcement.⁶⁷ Considerations regarding relocation must be grounded in the principle that “the right to remain in one’s home and community is central to the right to housing.”⁶⁸ If relocation is consistent with the human rights of residents, it will almost always be achievable without the use of force.

57 If government authorities propose the relocation of residents of homeless encampments, and the residents desire to remain in situ, the burden of proof is on the government to demonstrate why in situ upgrading is unfeasible.⁶⁹

58 If, after meaningful engagement with those affected, relocation is deemed necessary and/or desired by encampment residents, adequate alternative housing must be provided in close proximity to the original place of residence and source of livelihood.⁷⁰ If governments have failed to provide residents with housing options that

⁶⁷ A/HRC/40/61, para 38.

⁶⁸ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 26.

⁶⁹ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 32.

⁷⁰ A/HRC/4/18, annex I, para. 60.

they find acceptable, residents must be permitted to remain or be provided with a satisfactory alternative location, while adequate permanent housing options are negotiated and put in place.

59 If, in the exceptional case there is no viable alternative to eviction by authorities, eviction must be compliant with all aspects of international human rights law.⁷¹ Compliance with international human rights law requires:

i. **Prohibition against the removal of residents' private property without their knowledge and consent**

The removal of residents' private property by governments and those acting on their behalf, including the police, without their knowledge and consent, is strictly prohibited.⁷² Such actions are contrary to the rights of residents and may contribute to the deepening of residents' marginalization, exclusion, and homelessness.⁷³ Governments and police must also seek to actively prevent the removal of homeless residents' private property by private actors or any other form of harassment.

ii. **Adherence to the right to housing and other human rights standards when relocation is necessary or preferred**

Adequate alternative housing, with all necessary amenities (particularly water, sanitation and electricity), must be in place for all residents prior to their eviction.⁷⁴ Alternative housing arrangements should be in close proximity to the original place of residence and to services, community support, and livelihood.⁷⁵ It is critical that all encampment residents be allowed to participate in decisions regarding relocation, including the timing and site of relocation.⁷⁶ A full hearing of the residents' concerns with the proposed relocation should be held, and alternatives explored.

⁷² A/HRC/4/18, *Basic Guidelines on Development Based Evictions*, see para 50: "States and their agents must take steps to ensure that no one is subject to direct or indiscriminate attacks or other acts of violence, especially against women and children, or arbitrarily deprived of property or possessions as a result of demolition, arson and other forms of deliberate destruction, negligence or any form of collective punishment. Property and possessions left behind involuntarily should be protected against destruction and arbitrary and illegal appropriation, occupation or use."

⁷³ National Law Centre on Homelessness & Poverty. (2017). *Violations of the Right to Privacy for Persons Experiencing Homelessness in the United States*. Available from: <https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Special-Rapporteur-Right-to-Privacy.pdf>. See para 7: "For them, whatever shelter they are able to construct, whether legally or illegally, is their home, and their right to privacy should inhere to that home the same as it would for any regularly housed person. To deny them that right is to further marginalize and dehumanize this already highly marginalized and dehumanized population."

⁷⁴ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 34.

⁷⁵ Basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement (A/HRC/4/18, annex I, para. 60) and A/HRC/4/18, annex I, para. 60.

⁷⁶ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 31.

iii. **Relocation must not result in the continuation or exacerbation of homelessness, or require the fracturing of families or partnerships**

Relocation must not result in the continuation or deepening of homelessness for residents.⁷⁷ Relocation must not require the separation of families or partners, as defined by rights-holders themselves, including chosen family and other kinship networks.⁷⁸ Governments should engage encampments with a view to keeping the community intact, if this is desired by the residents.⁷⁹ Governments should also ensure that relevant housing policies are supportive of the ways in which rights-holders define their own families, partnerships, communities and extended Indigenous kinship structures, and accommodate these whenever possible in public or social housing.

iv. **Access to justice to ensure procedural fairness and compliance with all human rights**

Access to justice must be ensured at all stages of government engagement with encampment residents, not just when eviction is imminent.⁸⁰ Access to justice and legal protection must meet international human rights law standards,⁸¹ including the provision of due process, access to legal aid, access to fair and impartial legal advice, and the ability to file complaints in a relevant forums (including Indigenous forums) that are geographically proximate.⁸²

⁷⁷ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁷⁸ UN Office of the High Commissioner. (2014). *Forced Evictions: Fact Sheet No. 25/Rev.1*. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS25.Rev.1.pdf>. See para 52: “States should also ensure that members of the same extended family or community are not separated as a result of evictions.”; also, UNHR Summary Conclusions on the Family Unit, Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/globalconsult/3c3d556b4/summary-conclusions-family-unity.html>, see para 8: “International human rights law has not explicitly defined ‘family’ although there is an emerging body of international jurisprudence on this issue which serves as a useful guide to interpretation. The question of the existence or non-existence of a family is essentially a question of fact, which must be determined on a case-by-case basis, requiring a flexible approach which takes account of cultural variations, and economic and emotional dependency factors. For the purposes of family reunification, ‘family’ includes, at the very minimum, members of the nuclear family (spouses and minor children).”

⁷⁹ A/HRC/43/43, para 42.

⁸⁰ A/HRC/43/43.

⁸¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7, para 3.

⁸² It should be noted that broad and inclusive participatory-based processes can potentially foster access to justice for equity-seeking groups, and such processes should be responsive to the unique barriers to justice these groups face.

Principle 5 in Action - *Melani v. City of Johannesburg*

Globally, there are many compelling examples of courts upholding the rights of informal settlements or homeless encampments right to remain in place (“in situ”) in their community. One such example is *Melani v. City of Johannesburg* in South Africa. In this case, the Slovo Park informal settlement challenged the City of Johannesburg’s decision to relocate the community to an alternative location 11 km away. The court held that the Government’s upgrading policy, as required by the constitutional right to housing, envisages “a holistic development approach with minimum disruption or distortion of existing fragile community networks and support structures and encourages engagement between local authorities and residents living within informal settlements.” The Court concluded that relocation must be “the exception and not the rule” and any relocation must be to a location “as close as possible to the existing settlement.” The Court ordered the City of Johannesburg to reverse the decision to relocate the community, and mandated the city to apply for funding for in situ upgrading.

The South African approach is an example of how some national courts are making the shift to adopt a human rights-based approach to encampments. This is a shift that moves in the right direction and should be applied by all courts in Canada.

PRINCIPLE 6: Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights⁸³

60 Much of the stigma attached to residents of encampments is a result of governments failing to ensure access to basic services, including access to clean water, sanitation facilities, electricity, and heat, as well as support services.⁸⁴ These conditions violate a range of human rights, including rights to housing, health, physical integrity, privacy, and water and sanitation.⁸⁵ In these conditions, residents face profound threats to dignity, safety, security, health, and wellbeing.⁸⁶ The denial of access to water and sanitation by governments constitutes cruel and inhumane treatment, and is prohibited under international human rights law.⁸⁷

⁸³ Details regarding securing basic needs consistent with human rights can be found in Schedule B.

⁸⁴ A/73/310/Rev.1.

⁸⁵ A/HRC/43/4.

⁸⁶ UN Water. *Human Rights to Water and Sanitation*. Available from: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/human-rights/>

⁸⁷ A/73/310/Rev.1, para 46: “Attempting to discourage residents from remaining in informal settlements or encampments by denying access to water, sanitation and health services and other basic necessities, as has been witnessed by the Special Rapporteur in San Francisco and Oakland, California, United States of

61 Canadian governments must ensure, at a minimum, that rudimentary adequacy standards are ensured in homeless encampments on an urgent and priority basis, while adequate housing options are negotiated and secured. Government’s compliance with international human rights law requires:

i. **Access to safe and clean drinking water**

Water and sanitation are critical to health for all people. Through *Resolution 64/292*, the United Nations explicitly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a “human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”⁸⁸ The *Resolution* calls upon States and international organizations “to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.” This obligation extends to those residing in homeless encampments.⁸⁹

ii. **Access to hygiene and sanitation facilities**

Homeless encampments must be provided with sufficient resources and supports to ensure access to hygiene and sanitation facilities – toilets, showers, hand-washing stations, for example – within the encampment, or within very close proximity. Using existing facilities that remain open to the general public will not be appropriate. Facilities should ensure the hygiene and dignity of all residents irrespective of needs or identity. Peer-led hygiene and sanitation facilities have worked well in some contexts.

iii. **Resources and support to ensure fire safety**

General safety precautions should be implemented in an encampment environment to ensure residents are safe from fire and chemical exposure. Fire Departments should assist residents in developing a harm reduction approach to fire safety.

iv. **Waste management systems**

The lack of waste management systems in encampments has serious health and safety implications. Encampments necessarily create garbage during the course of daily activities. Garbage piles can become combustible fire hazards and can increase the risk of exposure to chemical waste. Human and animal biological waste also poses a particular danger. Without sanitary facilities, accumulated fecal waste can contaminate the

America, 29 constitutes cruel and inhuman treatment and is a violation of multiple human rights, including the rights to life, housing, health and water and sanitation.”

⁸⁸A/RES/64/292, para 2. Available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/292.

⁸⁹ A/RES/64/292, para 3. Available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/292.

ground and transmit diseases.⁹⁰ The improper disposal of needles can also transmit diseases through puncture wounds or re-use of needles. It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that homeless encampments have sufficient resources for the establishment of waste management systems.

v. **Social Supports and Services**

Residents of homeless encampments should be ensured access to health, mental health, addiction, and broader social services in a manner equitable to other community residents and consistent with human rights. All supports should be culturally appropriate and anti-oppressive. Governments should consult encampment residents on how best to provide access to these services, including through approaches such as outreach and/or on-site service provision. The provision of social services should not be linked to data gathering of any kind.

vi. **Guarantee Personal Safety of Residents**

Although research indicates that unsheltered people in Canada are disproportionately targets of violence, rather than perpetrators,⁹¹ interpersonal violence and exploitation can occur within encampments. Interpersonal violence is often exacerbated when people do not have their basic needs met,⁹² thus the provision of meaningful resources and supports will likely help ameliorate issues of safety.

It is the State's duty to protect the safety of all residents, particularly those who may be particularly vulnerable to abuse, harm, trafficking, or exploitation. Responses to violence must be guided by principles of transformative justice, rather than reproduce punitive outcomes and must be based in community-developed safety protocols. Governments must recognize that engaging police or other state authorities as a response to violence in encampments may put people at increased risk of harm, including due to risks of being criminalized or incarcerated.

vii. **Facilities and resources that support food safety**

Consuming contaminated food or water can cause a variety of foodborne

⁹⁰ CalRecycle. *Homeless Encampment Reference Guide*. Available at:

<https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/illegaldump/homelesscamp#SolidWaste>

⁹¹ Sylvia, N., Hermer, J., Paradis, E., & Kellen, A. (2009). "More Sinned Against than Sinning? Homeless People as Victims of Crime and Harassment." In: Hulchanski, J. David; Campsie, Philippa; Chau, Shirley; Hwang, Stephen; Paradis, Emily (Eds.), *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada* (e-book), Chapter 7.2. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.

www.homelesshub.ca/FindingHome

⁹² Slabbert, I. (2017). Domestic violence and poverty: Some women's experiences. *Research on social work practice*, 27(2), 223-230.

illnesses. Encampments are often more susceptible to foodborne illnesses due to a lack of storage, cooling appliances, improperly cooked foods, and limited or no access to clean water. Diseases can spread quickly in an encampment setting.

One of the best ways to prevent the spread of illness is to for governments to provide resources that enable the encampment to implement food safety measurements such as refrigeration facilities, which are also important for storing medicines.

viii. **Resources to support harm reduction**

Governments must provide encampments with the resources to implement effective harm reduction measures. Appropriate professionals should support residents to establish emergency protocols for responding to overdoses and other health emergencies.

ix. **Rodent and pest prevention**

The presence of rodents and pests can pose a significant threat to the health of residents. Appropriate prevention and treatment options should be available for pest management that are safe for use in human environments. Encampment residents should be provided with the resources to prevent and address the presence of rodents and pests.

62 In implementing these standards, it must be recognized that residents of encampments are experts with respect to their living spaces — they often know what resources are needed and how best to mobilize them. As a matter of human rights, residents must be engaged in planning and carrying out any measures developed to improve access to basic services. Practices, systems, and agreements residents have already put in place should be respected by government officials and should inform any further improvements.

PRINCIPLE 7: Ensure human rights-based goals and outcomes, and the preservation of dignity for encampment residents

63 As a matter of international human rights law, the rights and dignity of residents must be at the heart of all government engagement with homeless encampments.⁹³ Dignity is an inherent human rights value that is reflected in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As such, Canadian governments have an obligation to bring about positive human rights outcomes in all of their activities and decisions concerning homeless encampments.

⁹³ ICESCR.

64 Where Canadian governments at any level make decisions with regards to encampments, it is essential that they do so taking into account the full spectrum of human rights of residents and ensure that their enjoyment of those rights is enhanced by all decisions. Any decision that does not lead to the furthering of human rights, fails to ensure their dignity, or represents a backwards step in terms of their enjoyment of human rights, is contrary to human rights law.

65 More broadly, the Canadian government has an obligation to the progressive realization of the right to housing, alongside all other human rights.⁹⁴ A central component of that obligation is to address on an urgent basis the needs of those in the greatest need. This means that Canadian governments must move, as a matter of priority, towards the full enjoyment of the right to housing for encampment residents.⁹⁵ When governments fail to bring about positive human rights outcomes for encampment residents, they fail their obligation to progressively realize the right to housing.⁹⁶

PRINCIPLE 8: Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples in all engagements with encampments

66 Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience some of the most severe and egregious forms of housing need, and are dramatically overrepresented in homeless populations across the country, including specifically amongst those who are sleeping rough.⁹⁷ Under these conditions, many Indigenous Peoples experience profound violations of the right to housing and the right to self-determination, as well as violations of the right to freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.⁹⁸

67 For Indigenous Peoples in Canada, encampments and political occupation may occur simultaneously as a means of survival and a means of asserting rights to lands and

⁹⁴ ICESCR, in General Comment No.3 on the nature of states parties' obligations under Art 2(1) of the ICESCR.

⁹⁵ ICESCR, Article 2(1).

⁹⁶ Further, if governments failed to ensure human rights outcomes were obtained for encampment residents, and residents suffered some detriment to their enjoyment of their rights (e.g., loss of dignity or ended up street homeless without any shelter at all), this might be classed as retrogression and a breach of obligations.

⁹⁷ See ESDC (Employment and Social Development Canada). (2019). *Everyone counts highlights: Preliminary results from the second nationally coordinated point-in-time count of homelessness in Canadian communities*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/reports/highlights-2018-point-in-time-count.html#3.5>. Similarly, the [2018 Toronto Street Needs Assessment](#) documented that 16% of those enumerated were Indigenous, and 38% of those sleeping rough were Indigenous. See also Patrick, C. (2014). *Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. Retrieved from <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/AboriginalLiteratureReview.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Article 3 of the *Declaration* and article 1 of the *Covenant*.

territories within cities and elsewhere. Whatever the impetus, any government engagement with Indigenous Peoples in encampments must be guided by the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil their distinct rights. These rights are outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as many other international human rights treaties.

68 Under international human rights laws, the enjoyment of the right to housing for Indigenous Peoples is “deeply interconnected with their distinct relationship to their right to lands, territories and resources, their cultural integrity and their ability to determine and develop their own priorities and strategies for development.”⁹⁹ Recognition of the indivisible nature of Indigenous Peoples’ human rights, and the obligation to uphold these rights, must shape all government engagement with Indigenous encampment residents, as well as the Indigenous Peoples who own or occupy the land or territories upon which the encampment is located.

69 Compliance with international human rights law requires:

i. **Recognition of the distinct relationship that Indigenous Peoples have to their lands and territories**

In order to ensure adequate housing for Indigenous Peoples, States, Indigenous authorities, and other actors must recognize the distinct spiritual and cultural relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with their lands and territories.¹⁰⁰ This recognition includes protection for Indigenous residents of encampments, who have the right to utilize their lands and territories in line with their own economic, social, political, spiritual, cultural, and traditional practices (as defined and assessed by the Peoples themselves).¹⁰¹

Under international human rights law, governments “should respect those housing structures which an Indigenous community deems to be adequate in the light of their own culture and traditions.”¹⁰² In the context of encampments, governments must respect Indigenous Peoples’ right to construct shelter and housing in ways that incorporate their lived histories, cultures, and experiences.¹⁰³

ii. **Guarantee of self-determination, free, prior and informed consent and**

⁹⁹ A/74/183, particularly para 6: “The right to adequate housing can be enjoyed by Indigenous Peoples only if its articulation under article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is understood as interdependent with and indivisible from the rights and legal principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

¹⁰⁰ A/74/183.

¹⁰¹ A/74/183.

¹⁰² A/74/183, para 62.

¹⁰³ A/74/183.

meaningful consultation of Indigenous Peoples

Governments must ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples in all decision-making processes that affect them.¹⁰⁴ Governments must consult with Indigenous encampment residents in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent before taking any action that may affect them.¹⁰⁵

Engagement with Indigenous communities should involve genuine dialogue and should be guided by “mutual respect, good faith and the sincere desire to reach agreement.”¹⁰⁶ This consultation process must engage representatives chosen by Indigenous Peoples themselves, in accordance with their own procedures and practices.¹⁰⁷ As outlined in Principle 2, governments must provide Indigenous residents with necessary institutional, financial, and other resources in order to support their right to participate.¹⁰⁸ Indigenous women and girls must be consulted on a priority basis.¹⁰⁹

iii. Prohibition against the forced eviction, displacement, and relocation of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples’ access to and control over their lands, territories and resources constitute a fundamental element of the realization of their right to adequate housing.¹¹⁰ As such, international human rights law strictly prohibits the relocation of Indigenous Peoples in the absence of free, prior, and informed consent.¹¹¹

iv. Protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination for Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples

Indigenous women, girls, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit peoples experience particular forms of violence – including sexual violence and

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular arts. 10, 19, and 23.

¹⁰⁶ A/74/183, para 56.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, art. 18. See also Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), art. 6(1)(b); American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, arts. XXI (2) and XXIII (1); and A/HRC/18/42, annex (Expert Mechanism advice No. 2 (2011)). See also Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 23 (1994) on the rights of minorities, para 7.

¹⁰⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ General Comment No. 4, para 12, and the basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement (A/HRC/4/18, annex I, para 39).

¹⁰⁹ A/74/183, para 59.

¹¹⁰ A/74/183, para 51. See also A/HRC/7/16, paras 45–48; The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Art. 26.2: “Indigenous Peoples have the right to own, use, develop, and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.”

¹¹¹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Art. 10: “Indigenous Peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous Peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.”

homicide – in relation to the intersection of their indigeneity, gender identity, socioeconomic and cultural status, and their housing status.¹¹² Canadian law recognizes the concept of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and under international human rights law all Indigenous women, girls, and those who are gender diverse or Two-Spirited “must enjoy full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination, whether inside or outside their communities.”¹¹³

It is incumbent upon governments to provide Indigenous women and girls protection and guarantee against all forms of violence and discrimination within encampments, including from state authorities, in a manner that is consistent with Indigenous self-determination and self-governance.

¹¹² A/74/183, para 59.

¹¹³ A/74/183, para. 59.

SCHEDULE A: Select Case Law on Homeless Encampments in Canada

Victoria (City) v. Adams, [2009 BCCA 563](#)¹¹⁴

The City of Victoria made an application for an injunction to remove a "tent city" at Cridge Park. The City relied on its *Streets and Traffic Bylaw* and *Parks Regulation Bylaw*, which prohibits loitering and taking up an overnight temporary residence in public places. On appeal, the Court of Appeal established that the Victoria City bylaws violated section 7 of the *Canadian Charter* "in that they deprive homeless people of life, liberty and security of the person in a manner not in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice," and the provisions were not saved by section 1 of the *Charter* (para. 42). The Court of Appeal confirmed that the bylaw was overbroad "because it is in effect at all times, in all public places in the City."¹¹⁵

Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz, 2015¹¹⁶

The City of Abbotsford applied for an interim injunction requiring the defendants to remove themselves and their encampment from a city park. The Court concluded that the bylaws were "grossly disproportionate" because:

"the effect of denying the City's homeless access to public spaces without permits and not permitting them to erect temporary shelters without permits is grossly disproportionate to any benefit that the City might derive from furthering its objectives and breaches the s. 7 *Charter* rights of the City's homeless."¹¹⁷

The Court concluded that allowing the City's homeless to set up their shelters overnight and taking them down during the day would "reasonably balance the needs of the homeless and the rights of other residents of the City."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *Victoria(City) v. Adams* (2009, BCCA 563). Online,

<https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcca/doc/2009/2009bccca563/2009bccca563.html?resultIndex=1>

¹¹⁵ The Court of Appeal stated at para. 116 that: "The prohibition on shelter contained in the Bylaws is overbroad because it is in effect at all times, in all public places in the City. There are a number of less restrictive alternatives that would further the City's concerns regarding the preservation of urban parks. The City could require the overhead protection to be taken down every morning, as well as prohibit sleeping in sensitive park regions." This case is perhaps one of the most notable successes in homeless litigation in Canada.

¹¹⁶ *Abbotsford (City) v. Shantz* (2016 BCSC 2437). Online,

<https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc2437/2016bcsc2437.html?resultIndex=1>

¹¹⁷ Para 224

¹¹⁸ The Court stated, "The evidence shows, however, that there is a legitimate need for people to shelter and rest during the day and no indoor shelter in which to do so. A minimally impairing response to balancing that need with the interests of other users of developed parks would be to allow overnight shelters to be erected in public spaces between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m. the following day." [para 276]

***British Columbia v. Adamson*, [2016 BCSC 584](#) [*Adamson #1*] and [2016 BCSC 1245](#) [*Adamson #2*]**¹¹⁹

The Province of BC applied for an interlocutory injunction to restrain the defendant encampment residents from trespassing on the Victoria courthouse green space. On the first application, the court concluded that the balance of convenience did not favour the granting of the injunction, stating

“the balance of convenience is overwhelmingly in favour of the defendants, who simply have nowhere to move to, if the injunction were to issue, other than shelters that are incapable of meeting the needs of some of them, or will result in their constant disruption and a perpetuation of a relentless series of daily moves to the streets, doorways, and parks of the City of Victoria.”¹²⁰

Following this, a second injunction was filed based on new evidence of the encampment deterioration conditions, as well as supporting evidence that the Province would make housing available to encampment residents. The court made an order requiring the encampment to be cleared, but granting residents to stay until alternate housing options were made available to them.¹²¹

***Vancouver (City) v. Wallstam*, [2017 BCSC 937](#)**¹²²

The City of Vancouver applied for an interlocutory injunction requiring encampment residents to vacate and remove all tents and other structures from a vacant city lot. The Court relied on the injunction test set out in *RJR-MacDonald*.¹²³ The court noted that:

“The test requires that the *applicant prove it will suffer irreparable harm* if the injunction is not granted...When I asked counsel what harm the *City* would suffer if the injunction was not granted, he answered that not granting the injunction would mean that a ‘vital social housing project won't go ahead’ and that interferes with the public good. He also points out the timeline for development of the project requires the injunction urgently ... While everyone can agree that more social housing is an important goal, I must balance that general concern against the position of the occupants that the tent city, as it currently exists, is now providing shelter and safe living space for the occupants.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ *British Columbia v. Adamson* (2016 BCSC 1245). Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2016/2016bcsc1245/2016bcsc1245.html?resultIndex=1>

¹²⁰ Para 183.

¹²¹ Paras 85-86,

¹²² *Vancouver (City) v. Wallstam* 2017 BCSC 937 at para 60. Online, <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/bcsc/doc/2017/2017bcsc937/2017bcsc937.html?resultIndex=1>

¹²³ In *RJR-MacDonald Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)*, [1994] 1 S.C.R. 311

¹²⁴ Para 46-47.

The court concluded that the City failed to meet the *RJR-MacDonald* test and dismissed the City's application, but without prejudice to bring it forward again on a more complete factual record.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Para 64.

SCHEDULE B: An Elaboration on Principle 6

Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights

Canadian governments must ensure, at a minimum, that rudimentary adequacy standards are ensured in homeless encampments on an urgent and priority basis, while adequate housing options are negotiated and secured. Government's compliance with international human rights law requires:

i. **Access to safe and clean drinking water**

Water and sanitation are critical to health for all people. Through *Resolution 64/292*, the United Nations explicitly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a "human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights."¹²⁶ The *Resolution* calls upon States and international organizations "to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all." This obligation extends to those residing in homeless encampments.¹²⁷

To ensure access to safe and clean drinking water, governments should provide homeless encampments with resources for:

- On site/close-proximity clean and safe drinking/potable water, ensuring a sufficient number of access points for water relative to the number of residents
- Dishwashing Station(s) with clean water, sufficient in number for the number of residents

ii. **Access to hygiene and sanitation facilities**

Homeless encampments must be provided with sufficient resources and supports to ensure access to hygiene and sanitation facilities – toilets, showers, hand-washing stations, for example – within the encampment, or within very close proximity. Using existing facilities that remain open to the general public will not be appropriate. Facilities should ensure the hygiene and dignity of all residents irrespective of needs or identity. Peer-led hygiene and sanitation facilities have worked well in some contexts.

Hygiene and sanitation facilities should include:

- Washing stations, including showers with privacy and safety for women and gender diverse peoples, stocked with soap, water, paper towels

¹²⁶A/RES/64/292, para 2. Available at:

https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/292.

¹²⁷ A/RES/64/292, para 3. Available at:

https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/292.

- Adequate numbers of toilets based on the encampment population which must be accessible for residents with disabilities. Every toilet station must also have a hand-washing station
- Access to cleaning and bathing supplies
- Access to free laundry facilities
- Free feminine hygiene products
- Access to clean bedding

iii. **Resources and support to ensure fire safety**

General safety precautions should be implemented in an encampment environment to ensure residents are safe from fire and chemical exposure. Fire Departments should assist residents in developing a harm reduction approach to fire safety. Residents should be provided with resources to support best safety practices, including:

- Fire-safety approved sources of heat (e.g., safe metal vessels for heat)
- Warming tents
- In-tent heat sources
- Fire-proof tents
- Fire evacuation plan
- Signage indicating evacuation plans
- Accessible information on fire safety tips and how to handle and store flammable materials (e.g., gasoline, butane, propane)
- Fire extinguishers appropriately spaced and training for residents on how to operate them
- Electricity/charging stations for phones and laptops
- On-site ashtrays or cigarette disposal posts

iv. **Waste management systems**

The lack of waste management systems in homeless encampments has serious health and safety implications. Encampments necessarily create garbage during the course of daily activities, including during food preparation or shelter building. Unwanted materials can pile up quickly when there is no waste system in place to remove garbage from the area. Garbage piles can become combustible fire hazards and can increase the risk of exposure to chemical waste.

Human and animal biological waste also poses a particular danger. Without sanitary facilities, accumulated fecal waste can contaminate the ground and transmit diseases.¹²⁸ The improper disposal of needles can also transmit diseases through puncture wounds or re-use of needles.

¹²⁸ CalRecycle. *Homeless Encampment Reference Guide*. Online at <https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/illegaldump/homelesscamp#SolidWaste>

It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that homeless encampments have sufficient resources for the establishment of waste management systems, which should include:

- Weekly garbage and recycling (more frequent if needed)
- Regular service for waste water and portable toilets
- Independent waste bins for flammable/hazardous waste (e.g., fuel, motor oil, batteries, light bulbs)
- Large rodent-proof waste bins with tight fitting lids
- Garbage bags, cleaning supplies, hand soap, hand sanitizer
- Waste water holding tanks (if there are no sewers near encampment)

v. **Social Supports and Services**

Residents of homeless encampments should be ensured access to health, mental health, addiction, and broader social services in a manner equitable to other community residents and consistent with human rights. All supports should be culturally appropriate and anti-oppressive. Governments should consult encampment residents on how best to provide access to these services, including through approaches such as outreach and/or on-site service provision. The provision of social services should not be linked to data gathering of any kind.

i. **Guarantee Personal Safety of Residents**

Although research indicates that unsheltered people in Canada are disproportionately targets of violence, rather than perpetrators,¹²⁹ interpersonal violence and exploitation can occur within encampments. Interpersonal violence is often exacerbated when people do not have their basic needs met,¹³⁰ thus the provision of meaningful resources and supports will likely help ameliorate issues of safety.

It is the State's duty to protect the safety of all residents, particularly those who may be particularly vulnerable to abuse, harm, trafficking, or exploitation. Responses to violence must be guided by principles of transformative justice, rather than reproduce punitive outcomes and must be based in community-developed safety protocols. Governments must recognize that engaging police or other state authorities as a response to violence in encampments may put people at increased risk of harm, including due to risks of being criminalized or incarcerated.

¹²⁹ Sylvia, N., Hermer, J., Paradis, E., & Kellen, A. (2009). "More Sinned Against than Sinning? Homeless People as Victims of Crime and Harassment." In: Hulchanski, J. David; Campsie, Philippa; Chau, Shirley; Hwang, Stephen; Paradis, Emily (Eds.), *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada* (e-book), Chapter 7.2. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.

www.homelesshub.ca/FindingHome

¹³⁰ Slabbert, I. (2017). Domestic violence and poverty: Some women's experiences. *Research on social work practice*, 27(2), 223-230.

Any approach to addressing interpersonal safety within encampments must:

- Center on the most vulnerable members of the encampment, namely: BIPOC, women, trans-people and other LGBTQ2S+ persons, persons with disabilities, and other groups who experience discrimination or marginalization.
- Provide resources and supports to allow for Indigenous and other non-colonial approaches to conflict resolution.
- Provide safe, confidential, accessible, and non-coercive mechanisms through which individuals experiencing violence can report these experiences and receive trauma-informed supports and services, ensuring that these individuals are able to access alternative safe housing (as desired).

vi. **Facilities and resources that support food safety**

Consuming contaminated food or water can cause a variety of foodborne illnesses. Encampments are often more susceptible to foodborne illnesses due to a lack of storage, cooling appliances, improperly cooked foods, and limited or no access to clean water. Diseases can spread quickly in an encampment setting.

One of the best ways to prevent the spread of illness is to for governments to provide resources that enable the encampment to implement food safety measurements. This includes:

- Rodent-proof storage containers, with lids that can be sealed
- Shelving units to ensure food is stored off the ground
- Soap and sanitizer to clean food preparation surfaces
- Cooling appliance(s) to prevent spoilage
- Cooking appliance(s) to ensure food is thoroughly cooked

vii. **Resources to support harm reduction**

Governments must provide homeless encampments with the resources to implement effective harm reduction measures within homeless encampments. Appropriate professionals should support residents to establish emergency protocols for responding to overdoses and other health emergencies.

Encampment residents should be provided with:

- Overdose prevention training (e.g., CPR training)
- Overdose prevention supplies (e.g., Naloxone)
- Overdose Prevention Sites, where possible
- Puncture-proof containers for needle disposal
- Harm reduction outreach supports
- Regular servicing of puncture-proof containers by a certified waste-management company

- Information about available emergency services in the event of overdoses or other health-related crises

viii. **Rodent and pest prevention**

The presence of rodents and pests can pose a significant threat to the health of residents. Appropriate prevention and treatment options should be available for pest management that are safe for use in human environments (e.g., diatomaceous earth). Encampment residents should be provided with the resources to prevent and address the presence of rodents and pests, including:

- Resources and information on rodent and pest prevention
- A bait-station to detract rodents from sleeping tents, regularly serviced and monitored
- Cleaning materials and gloves to dispose of rodents

In implementing these standards, it must be recognized that residents of encampments are the experts of their living spaces — they often know what resources are needed and how best to mobilize them. As a matter of human rights, encampment residents must be engaged in planning and carrying out any measures developed to improve access to basic services for the encampment. Practices, systems, and agreements residents already have in place should be recognized by government officials and should inform any further improvements.