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Los Angeles Community Action Network: U.N. Report Highlights L.A. Failure to Address Homelessness

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Impact of Skid Row Visit Informs Scathing U.N. Report on Poverty in America

A new United Nations report concludes policy makers rely on criminalizing poor people “to create the mirage of something having been done.”

Los Angeles - The report, by U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston on his multi-city tour of the United States last December, which included a Skid Row town hall and walkabout hosted by the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), condemns government policies at all levels for driving up already devastating inequality — and cites Los Angeles as “particularly callous” for trying to arrest its way out of homelessness.

In November 2017, LA CAN produced its own report “Dirty Divide: Out of Service”, which found constitutional violations, breaches of domestic and international legal requirements with regards to housing, public health, disenfranchisement and large scale criminalization of houseless people living in Skid Row. The ‘Dirty Divide’ also illustrated the dismissive and ultimately life-threatening ramifications of inaccurate undercounts of homeless populations in various Los Angeles County reports.

As has been the trend, the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority’s (LAHSA) 2018 homeless count showed a slight dip in homelessness, despite an increase in the number of people falling into homelessness for the first time. Referring to LAHSA’s point-in-time estimate methodology, the U.N. report stated there “is ample evidence that these figures significantly underestimate the actual scale of the problem.” The report also found fault with L.A.’s coordinated entry system

(CES) to match homeless housing supply to demand. Such information technology-based systems “contribute to the process of criminalization by requiring the homeless to take part in an intrusive survey” while “diverting resources and attention away from the key problem, which is the lack of available housing for those in need,” according to the report.

“House keys, not handcuffs,” demands General Dogon of Los Angeles Community Action Network, who accompanied the special rapporteur on his tour of Skid Row. “Every dollar that goes to the LAPD is theft from those who are houseless and criminalized for being poor.”

LA CAN has tirelessly campaigned to draw attention to the persistent denial of equal treatment and racist practices played out in Skid row, a truth the U.N Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights noted in his visit, “The evidence is everywhere. On Skid Row in Los Angeles, 14,000 homeless persons were arrested in 2016 for urinating in public, while overall arrests in the city were declining. For those wondering what the problem is, the answer is not hard to find. In 2016 there were only nine public toilets available for some 1,800 homeless individuals on Skid Row. The resulting ratio of one public toilet per 200 individuals would not even meet the minimum standards the UN sets for Syrian refugee camps.” Alston’s report encompasses a sense of humanity void in Los Angeles policy makers, and appeals that “Citizens and local authorities, rather than treating homeless persons as affronts to their sensibilities and neighbourhoods, should see in their presence a tragic indictment of community and government policies. Homelessness on this scale is far from inevitable and reflects political choices to see the solution as law enforcement rather than adequate and accessible low-cost housing, medical treatment, psychological counselling and job training.”

Pete White of Los Angeles Community Action Network states, “The U.N. continues to confirm the presence of gross human rights violations in the City of Angels. It is unfortunate that an international body arrived at this conclusion after one visit while in Los Angeles organizations like LA CAN have fought for decades in order for the city to acknowledge these.”

To download the “The Dirty Divide: Out of Service”, visit:

<http://congress.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Out-of-Service-Report.pdf>

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