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Parliament Poised to Adopt Bill to End Homelessness

Ottawa – Non-governmental organizations are welcoming the arrival of Bill C-304 – *An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians* – back into Parliament for third and final reading. “This is the most important piece of social policy legislation to come before Parliament in this session,” said Leilani Farha, Executive Director Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. “In compliance with the Government’s obligation under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, this Bill requires the federal government to work with all levels of government and stakeholders to develop a national strategy to end homelessness and paves the way to ensuring adequate housing as a fundamental human right for everyone in Canada.”

NGO’s are urging all parties to support the bill. “Addressing homelessness and inadequate housing is a non-partisan issue” says Julia Beazley, Coordinator for StreetLevel: The National Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness.

It is estimated that between 150,000 and 300,000 people experience homelessness every year in Canada. Bill C-304 mandates particular attention to the homeless, the elderly, persons with disabilities, families with children, Aboriginal communities, and those experiencing violence.

Véronique Laflamme, organizer of the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, notes that “UN human rights bodies and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing have urged “federal, provincial and territorial governments to address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency.” ”

Charlie Hill, Executive Director of the National Aboriginal Housing Association states that “this Bill would go some distance to ensure that Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Métis and Inuit – including those living in urban areas, are consulted on a national housing strategy. Aboriginal peoples have the worst housing conditions in the country, with over 20% of the non-reserve Aboriginal population in core housing need.”

Bill C-304 requires that the housing strategy include financial assistance for those who are otherwise unable to afford housing and targets and timetables to eliminate homelessness. In compliance with recommendations from the United Nations to Canada, the strategy will also include a process for independent monitoring of progress made and a complaints procedure to address possible violations of the right to adequate housing.

“We are disappointed that a Speaker’s ruling has removed a Bloc amendment that was supported by the HUMA Committee. That amendment provided Quebec with the choice of opting out of a national strategy,” Véronique Laflamme said. “We nevertheless urge that Bill C-304 be adopted because it would strengthen recognition of the right to housing in Canada. If it is adopted, we will work to ensure that Quebec – which also ratified the ICESCR – may use the benefits that will result from the national housing strategy as part of its own social housing programs.”

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