

Good afternoon, my name is Tim Richter and I'm President of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on Bill C-97.

I would like to speak briefly about the National Housing Strategy Act and the Right to Housing.

### **Homelessness in Canada**

For most Canadians, a home is something we take for granted. Unfortunately, for far too many Canadians a lack of housing is a matter of life and death.

235,000 different Canadians experience homelessness every year at an estimated cost of over \$7 billion annually. Homelessness in Canada is on the same scale as our worst natural disasters, but unlike those natural disasters, homelessness is manmade.

Homelessness, on the scale we see it today has not always existed. Modern mass homelessness in Canada is the result of policy choices made largely by the federal government in the late 1980s and 1990s –specifically decisions to eliminate affordable housing programs.

The National Housing Strategy begins to reverse those choices. Embedding the Right to Housing in the National Housing Strategy Act as federal policy, ensures not only will Canada place in law important protections for vulnerable Canadians, we will hardwire into the National Housing Strategy measures that will make it more effective.

### **Getting the Right to Housing Right**

The National Housing Strategy Act makes a policy commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, creates an independent Housing Advocate supported by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, establishes a National Housing Council with explicit inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness and inadequate housing, and commits to ensuring participation of affected communities.

However, as it is written, the National Housing Strategy Act lacks essential elements of a workable, human rights accountability framework. Some additional elements need to be added for the legislation to implement an effective rights-based approach as promised when the National Housing Strategy was introduced in November 2017, and as required to bring Canada in line with international human rights standards.

We have been working with the government and Parliamentarians to make a few simple amendments, so that the National Housing Strategy Act:

- establishes a monitoring role for the Housing Council, that does not simply provide advice, but tracks progress on implementing the progressive realization of the right to housing;
- mandates the Housing Advocate to receive and investigate petitions identifying systemic housing rights issues, monitors and assesses compliance with the progressive realization of the right to housing, and makes specific recommendations to the Minister that the Minister must respond to; and,
- establishes a procedure for the Housing Advocate to refer important systemic housing rights issues to public hearings before a three-person panel drawn from the Housing Council, ensuring affected groups have a voice, and that the panel's recommendations will be considered by the Minister.

Legislation implementing a rights-based national housing strategy provides an historic opportunity for the federal government to address, as a priority, a critical human rights issue at home and at the same time to provide leadership in human rights internationally.

This is the first time in Canada's history that legislation recognizing the right to housing has been introduced and it is critical that this be done right. In the National Housing Strategy Act, the government provides an historic policy commitment to the right to housing, but that commitment must include mechanisms to ensure that this historic policy commitment is meaningfully implemented.

Thank you