A Pandemic of Violations

Forced Evictions and Other Habitat-related Human Rights Violations amid COVID-19



Housing and Land Rights Network ● Habitat International Coalition

Housing and Land Rights Network
HABITAT INTERNATIONAL COALITION

HLRN Coordination Office and
Middle East/North Africa Program:

4 Sulaiman Abaza Street, 3rd Floor • Muhandisin, Cairo EGYPT

Tel./Fax: +20 (0)2 3762–8617 • E-mail: hlrn@hlrn.org / hic-mena@hic-mena.org
HLRN Websites: www.hlrn.org / www.hic-mena.org

UN Liaison Office:

15, Rue des Savoises • 1205 Geneva SWITZERLAND
Tel./Fax: +41 (0)79 503–1485 • E-mail: hlrn@hlrn.org

HIC América Latina (LAC):

Calle Nicolás San Juan 1015 b int.2 • Colonia del Valle Centro• 06760 Mexico D.F.
Tel: +52 (0)55 5512–1586 • Telefax: +52 (0)55 5512–6726 • E-mail: info@hic-al.org
Web: http://www.hic-al.org/

HLRN Sub-Saharan Africa Program (SSAP):

c/o Mazingira Institute
P.O. Box 14550 • Nairobi KENYA
Tel: +254 (0)2 443–226/443–229/443–219 • Fax: +254 (0)2 444–643
E-mail: mazinst@mitsuminet.com • Web: www.mazinst.org

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Authors: Yasser Abdelkader, Heather Elaydi, Ahmed Mansour, Joseph Schechla

Cover Photo: Children look at an advocacy graffiti by the Mathare Roots's youth group, warning against the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), at the Mathare Valley slum, in Nairobi, Kenya, 19 April 2020. Source: Thomas Mukoya/Reuters.

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Foreword

On the occasion of this World Habitat Day (5 October 2020), Habitat International Coalition's Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN) issues this regular report on trends and themes arising from its monitoring and documentation of cases entered into the HLRN Violation Database (VDB). This year's production, *A Pandemic of Violations*, considers the central theme that confronts us all this year; i.e., the global emergency amid COVID-19.

The VDB is the outcome of a 2005 HIC Member call for the Coalition to develop the capacity to monitor and diagnose violations of housing and land rights across its regions. Since then, it has been a standard feature of HLRN's specialization and service to Habitat International Coalition (HIC) Members and the public by applying the universal human rights criteria for adequate housing in cases of deprivation arising from forced eviction, dispossession, destruction/demolition and privatization. These simple and identifiable categories of violation of the human rights to adequate housing and land occur either discretely, or in combination throughout the regions of the world and in most countries at any given time. The VDB has remained the unique resource for tracking these instances that is open to the public to enter and/or extract information about such instances of violation, and is searchable by these corresponding categories of country, region, type of violation and/or span of time.

This year's report is the outcome of a search of the VDB entries from the time that the novel COVID-19 pandemic became known (roughly, 1 January 2020) until this World Habitat Day across every country and region, as well as all four types of violation captured. The overwhelming majority of these cases reflect the monitoring, verification and data-entry work of a four-person HLRN team operating from Cairo, Egypt. However, in response to a special HLRN call for contributions corresponding to this pandemic period, HIC Members and allies in the wider community of housing and land rights defenders, advocates and monitors have contributed several cases, which contributions are specifically cited in the report. To them, we owe special thanks and appreciation for bringing these to the attention of the HLRN team.

This report is rich in examples, but is by no means comprehensive of all possible violations or groups affected. Nonetheless, it tries to faithfully represent the possibility of tracking housing and land rights violations around the world in a forensic process. In doing so, the VDB also reveals the shortcomings in the monitoring and reporting of such cases, generally, in that many lack sufficient information about the numbers and characteristics of victims, duty holders and liable parties, and especially do not provide quantitative and qualitative assessments of their impacts. This general paucity of data globally has led HLRN to specialize in developing and applying tools and techniques for evaluation, assessment and actual quantification of the material and intangible impacts of such violations as data essential to making informed decisions about intervention strategies, knowing the values at stake in case of vulnerability to violation, entitlements for full reparation of victims and/or assignment of liability for such gross violations of human rights, in particular, the human right to adequate housing.

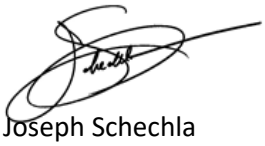
No context could be more relevant for such an exercise than the complex crisis represented by the current pandemic. This global assessment charts the stubborn callousness and consequences of continuous assault on people's means of shelter and subsistence that can be found in the traceable public record during COVID-19. It also raises a flag to point out the augury of violations yet to come as a direct or result of the world-wide climate, economic, financial, public health and human rights emergency, as well as points to priorities for recovery. These pages also demonstrate how, despite our differences and distances between us, the pandemic shows how we are all in it together.

This pivotal moment is also one of transition for HIC. Amid shifts in global conditions that spark new thinking, HIC stands at another crossroads with the HIConstitution-mandated shift of its Secretariat to a new center in the Global South and a transition in leadership with the departure of its Secretary-General Álvaro Puertas Robina and the induction of a new Secretary-General Yolande Hendler. We thank Álvaro heartfully for a job well done, enduring friendships and dedicated service to HIC and its constituents. Meanwhile, we join the rest of our colleagues in warmly welcoming Yolande and renewed enthusiasm for making more HICstory grounded in deep learning and solid institutional foundations.

HIC has entered this pandemic year also with its recently elected president Adriana Allen, who has hit the ground running in the steady footsteps of her capable predecessor, Lorena Zárate. A debt of gratitude goes out also to the members of HLRN's executive Board: Ana Sugranyes Bickel, Diana Lee-Smith and Rania al-Madi for their support and wise guidance through this extraordinary period. And, of course, we thank the supporting partners of HIC and HLRN for their accompaniment and understanding through this uncertain time.

Special thanks also to the HLRN Cairo team of Yasser Abdelkader, Heather Elaydi and Ahmed Mansour, each of whom has played a complementary role in maintaining and populating the VDB and contributing to this report and the analysis contained. Their example shows how teamwork can continue productively even by remote and in confinement.

Despite waning optimism on other fronts, HLRN still hopes that the alarm raised in this publication will draw us even closer together, at least in spirit, social-distancing restrictions notwithstanding. By doing so, the lessons learned should point to the change in human behavior needed to repair the catastrophic fault lines and broken promises revealed by the present pandemic and to develop a natural, social and built environment that realizes a human rights habitat for everyone, everywhere in the smarter future before us.



Joseph Schechla
Coordinator
Housing and Land Rights Network
– Habitat International Coalition



Figure 1: HLRN's Violation Database search page at: http://www.hlrn.org/welcome_violation.php#.X34n3fZuJi4

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Introduction

On World Habitat Day, António Guterres, the UN Secretary General (UNSG) recognized that urban centers are ground-zero of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with 90% of reported cases of infection, and that cities bear the brunt of the crisis often with strained health systems, inadequate water and sanitation services and other challenges, especially in poor areas, where the pandemic is deeply rooted in equalities. That diagnosis held true for much of the world since early 2020, when HIC-HLRN undertook to concentrate its monitoring and documentation of cases in the HLRN's Violation Database (VDB) on the patterns and trends emerging through the pandemic.

Global public-health advice has demanded that people stay in their homes and avoid unnecessary contact with anyone outside their household, and entire indigenous, colonized and occupied peoples have expressed the human need for their land as a matter of survival and food sovereignty at this time of confinement and curtailed mobility. Meanwhile, huge numbers of such people in every region nonetheless have found themselves increasingly vulnerable to loss of those very homes and lands.

The public-health crisis and related economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic have put the lives and/or livelihoods of millions — perhaps billions — of people around the globe in jeopardy. Physical-distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders have completely halted many normal activities that require physical interaction among people, leading to social estrangement and massive job losses in many countries. These conditions also have aggravated the consequences of typical violations of the human rights to adequate housing in the forms of forced eviction, demolition, dispossession and privatization of the human habitat.

The most-prevalent violation of the human right to adequate housing is the practice of forced eviction, 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." Forced eviction has been authoritatively affirmed (in 1993 and 2004) to constitute a "gross violation" of human rights. So, what is to be done?

A Moratorium?

Forced evictions have continued throughout the global public-health emergency despite repeated calls by the international community to halt evictions and displacements, and to take measures to protect those in need. As soon as the potentially devastating effects of the pandemic became apparent, HIC and HLRN issued a statement calling for "a total ban on forced evictions, home demolitions, involuntary relocations and dispossession by all spheres of government, sectors and actors, whether in urban or rural contexts" and urging, among other things, an end to job layoffs, a moratorium on rent and mortgage payments, and the conversion of unused buildings into housing for those in need.

Other recommendations by human rights advocates followed: In March, the outgoing Special Rapporteur on adequate housing (SRAH) issued a COVID-19 Guidance Note on the Prohibition of evictions and protecting renters and mortgage payers, noting also that "Housing has become the front line defence against the coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation." One month later, the outgoing SRAH issued her second Guidance Note "Protecting those living with homelessness," a global population of about 800 million. The incoming SRAH echoed that message in August to assert that: "Losing your home during this pandemic could mean losing your life," adding "The

rights to life and adequate housing are intrinsically linked." By that date, he already had noted disturbing patterns of pandemic eviction taking place, nonetheless, in Brazil, Kenya and Haïti, affecting an estimated 11,000 people.

By May, ESCR-Net's Global Call to Action demanded "halting evictions, land dispossessions, utility cut-offs, and related rights violations," while the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) released COVID-19 Guidance that urges "good practices such as moratoriums on evictions, and deferrals of mortgage payments" to prevent increased homelessness. Also in May, UN Habitat issued a policy statement, calling on states and all spheres of government "to stop all relocations and evictions at this time."

Conscientious public servants have similarly called for bans on eviction during the crisis, and local authorities actually have taken such measures in numerous cities. Some central governments did enact limited moratoriums on evictions, as well as many states in the United States of America (USA). However, these moratoriums, along with other temporary-relief measures, are—or soon will be—expired. The looming eviction crisis in the USA also has captured the attention of politically savvy comedians such as John Oliver and Hassan Minaj, who succinctly captured the link between housing and health: "If you're going to shelter in place, you kinda need the shelter part."

As in many other countries, predictions also show that such evictions would hit minority communities hardest. To certain communities, forced eviction and other violations of habitat-related human rights are nothing new. For indigenous peoples and people under occupation, these patterns are central to the military doctrine and *raison d'état* of their occupiers. For them, their much-called-for "resilience" involves a constant exercise at recovering from deliberate violations back to a dismal starting point, which is far short of promised sustainable development, but with cumulative visible and invisible consequences, while newly facing an additional microscopic predator.

On 1 July 2020, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2532, which demands "a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda." Despite this "enforceable" call, occupying and warring states continued to exert the violence of eviction and displacement against indigenous peoples and targeted communities from their own lands. Contrary to S/RES/2532, certain governments and their military organs are using the distraction caused by the pandemic to advance their crimes, increasing violent attacks, land grabbing, illegal annexation of territories and demographic manipulation.

Related to conflict and persecution is the global refugee and displacement crisis. The concerned agencies emphasized the need for extra protection measures, with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issuing interim guidance at the end of March. This was followed by more-specific guidance for the protection of women and girls, as well as children, in general. The multi-agency Global Shelter Cluster issued Key Messages on Security of Tenure and COVID-19, and its Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Area of Responsibility has provided a template decree to support advocacy efforts with concerned authorities.

In other circumstances, deforestation and land grabbing actually have been found to exacerbate the COVID crisis. Brazil's National Institute of Space Research (INPE) and its real-time deforestation detection system alerted to a 64% increase in deforestation of the Amazon in April 2020, compared to same time last year. This spike in rainforest destruction is also affecting indigenous and preserved areas of the region, with alerts in these territories rising 59% in the first four months of 2020.

Undeterred, national elites in several countries are using reduced mobility and the shrinking space for oversight and accountability during lockdowns rather as an opportunity to seize lands. Corporations and governments are pressing on with local "consultations" to secure approvals of their land-based projects during the dual public health and economic crisis, while rightful owners and guardians of the land face increased difficulties to meaningfully engage. Emblematic of this approach is the half-trillion-dollar Neom mega-city project in Saudi Arabia, pursued against the will of the local inhabitants and leading to the state-sponsored assassination of their leader in March 2020.

HLRN's VDB can capture only violations already committed; however, experts still predict an "avalanche of evictions" across countries with temporary moratoriums ending in the coming months. In the USA, while physical evictions may have been reduced, courts are still open to hear cases and prepare landlords to imminently evict tenants once the bans are lifted. As governments and companies push through agribusiness, mining and infrastructure megaprojects on ancestral lands, predatory investors are poised to swoop up vast properties from their COVID-distressed owners, like in the aftermath of the cyclical 2008 financial crisis. Current patterns and trends indicate a perilous future for adequate housing, land and other habitat-related human rights across urban and rural landscapes.

Poverty and Unpreparedness

Going into the pandemic, the state of the human habitat was already in crisis, with well-reported depletion of the natural world and extinction of species that have accompanied and resulted from climate change, with particularly consumptive and polluting societies contributing more than their share to the loss. Despite the visionary—if late-in-coming—Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the need for their holistic approach to development and international cooperation speak to the urgency of corrective measures in the policy and operational spheres. Already, several notable opportunities were missed also in the Habitat III process to evaluate global performance and sufficiently interrogate such core issues as population growth and urbanization, as such.

That is not to say that humankind has not progressed over the decades. In fact, millions have been lifted out of poverty and life expectancy has risen globally since the late 20th Century. However, such precarious gains have given way to dire predictions of undoing our advances in earning and learning as a result of the pandemic.

At the start of the COVID crisis, already some 1.8 billion people worldwide were estimated to live in homelessness and grossly inadequate housing, often in overcrowded conditions, lacking access to water and sanitation, making them particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus, as they are often suffering from multiple, underlying health issues.

Latin America has been a region severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Peru, for example, before the pandemic, the slight reduction in monetary poverty had not yet translated into greater access to, or quality of public services, considered key for the well-being and development of citizens. These include habitat goods and services such as housing and sanitation, etc. In Peru, 43.7% of the urban population lives in marginal neighborhoods, informal settlements or inadequate housing and/or slums. They live in homes that lack secure tenure, structural quality and durability, adequate drinking water supply or sanitation services. Amid serious overcrowding (3.4 people or more per room), the

motto #QuedateEnCasa (stay home) as a mitigation measure against the pandemic only mocks those 70% of Peruvians who live in such adequate housing.

Peru's Center for Population Research, Documentation and Counseling (CIDAP) has characterized these conditions as follows:

- 47.5% of families do not have a refrigerator and lack information about adaptation measures in quarantine, on the restriction of days and hours to buy provisions to avoid crowds. Many of these families, in order not to go hungry, were victims of crowds and continuous outings that made them vulnerable to contagion.
- 7–8 million Peruvians still do not have access to drinking water, 2 million live without electricity, making them more vulnerable, while government justifies its poor service coverage due to incomplete information to locate these people.
- The #Bono, or personal subsidy, is seriously deficient, leaving out 40% of those in need, and suffers poor delivery by banks with large crowds and long delays.
- The #Suspensión Perfecta is another invention of the government's free-market economic policy, "perfectly" stripping workers of their labor rights.
- National unemployment doubled in the first quarter of quarantine: Job losses have affected 75% of the poorest in Lima, while affecting only 6% of the wealthiest.
- Labor informality in Peru is ca. 75%, including precarious employment, without labor rights, with street vending a prominent means of daily survival, posing the dilemma "to die from hunger or from COVID-19."
- Official figures cite precarious (i.e., "informal") trade and "entrepreneurs" is concentrated in district markets, fairs, popular emporiums as the main contagion spaces.
- Public transport has been "liberalized" (privatized) and precarious for 30 years, called "informal" due to the use of minibuses, rural vans, motorcycle taxis, etc. that, in a pandemic, lack infrastructure and regulation, and contribute to contagion.
- For 30 years, the Public Health and Education Facilities and Services is precarious and chaotic and, in the pandemic, now closed instead of being improved and reactivated for primary care and decongesting the saturated hospitals.
- Due to job loss, not being able to pay rent and other reasons, the exodus from urban hunger has seen approximately 600,000 migrants return on foot from Lima to their places of origin in the Andean and rainforest regions, exceeding government forecasts and mitigation measures, and spreading infections from cities into the interior, where health facilities are weak.

Precarious living conditions and livelihoods have exacerbated the crisis in other regions also. Consistent with the findings over 15 years of the VDB's operation, the typical victims of these abuses are the most-impoverished: minority and vulnerable populations, indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers and rural land-based poor, informally built communities, refugees and displaced persons, migrants and migrant workers, added to these in the pandemic is a newly popularized category of "essential workers."

Charting the Patterns

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, the most vulnerable have been the most affected by a particular convergence of threats. Even in countries not typically associated with violence and hostility, authorities and landlords have continued to evict people from their homes with a vengeance. HLRN has been collecting documentation of this global pattern of evictions occurring through its Violations Database (VDB) and *News Archive*, and this service has proved particularly useful in the current context. The trends have revealed a pattern of disproportionately afflicting the most vulnerable in society, regardless

of region. HLRN offers the following examples, as well as a comprehensive table of cases entered into



the VDB during the pandemic (see Annex).

Figure 2: Low-income Peruvians "queueing" in Lima to receive their bono (social subsidy) during the pandemic. Source: CIDAP.

Minorities

The current and, especially, anticipated forced evictions and dispossession in the world's largest economy have been targeting and threatening the USA's minority populations. The moratorium on evictions from federal (public) and tribal (indigenous) housing expired on 24 July, and the Trump Administration's stopgap measures have not been effective or encouraging, while the president's son-in-law/advisor has emerged as an infamous COVID-era evictor. While 43 states and the District of Columbia had issued some kind of eviction moratorium, with varying levels and periods of protection. those subnational-level protections only ranged from a few weeks to a few months in duration and did not apply to all evictions.

Notably, of the total 110 million renters in that country, the 30–40 million now face eviction by World Habitat Day 2020. Blacks, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPoC) are disproportionately rent-burdened and at risk of eviction. People of color are twice as likely to be renters and disproportionately likely to be low-income and rental cost-burdened. Numerous studies from cities across the USA confirm that people of color, particularly Black and Latinx people, constitute the overwhelming majority (approximately 80%) now facing eviction. Black households may be more than twice as likely as white households to be evicted. Existing patterns show that Hispanic tenants in predominantly white neighborhoods are roughly twice as likely to be evicted as Hispanics in predominantly non-white neighborhoods, and Hispanic tenants are also more likely to be evicted when their landlord is non-Hispanic.



*Figure 3: The cairn of belongings that remain for the family evicted from 3624 Urguhart St., New Orleans LA (USA) promptly on 30 July 2020, just after the eviction moratorium ended. Source: Jake Clapp/*Gambit.

Across the Atlantic, a European Union (EU) study released during the pandemic indicated how Roma and Travellers remain disproportionately affected by evictions in six surveyed countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and United Kingdom). In Belgium, 10% of Caravan dwellers and 5% of Roma, and the same proportion of Travellers in France have been evicted at least once in the previous five years. survey groups, 4% of the respondents had been evicted at least once. Meanwhile, 8% of Roma and Travellers surveyed expect authorities to evict them or force them to move in the next 6 months.

Roma and Travellers typically lack basic amenities in their housing and suffer severe housing deprivation much more often than the general population. Roma and Travellers living in apartments or houses in bad condition (26 %) generally show higher severe deprivation rates than others living in apartments or houses in the surveyed countries (10%).

Other studies have shown that 80% of the EU's Roma live below the poverty line, 30% have no running water and 46% live without an indoor toilet or shower. Roma populations are more at-risk for homelessness than non-Roma groups in Europe, making them especially susceptible to both contagion and various forms of discrimination. European observers have reported that Roma people have suffered disproportionately from COVID-19 and the security measures associated with the pandemic.

During the first half of 2020, Romani people have been affected by discrimination and institutional racism resulting in housing rights violations all across Europe. The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) recently reported on the situation in Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Moldavia, North

Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine. While this discrimination has manifested in various forms, including disproportionately onerous lockdowns and neglect, cases of housing and habitat-related human rights violations were most prominent in Belgium, Italy and Ukraine. The ERRC documented two cases in Belgium, affecting 16 Roma and four homes, two forced evictions/home demolitions in Ukraine, and over 363 incidents in Italy involving evictions from, and dispossession of housing. However, details are scarce and the VDB has recorded the loss of only 108 accommodations and the eviction of 549 people in seven of these cases. Many actions against small groups of Roma are euphemistically termed "removals" rather than "evictions" and, thus, go underreported.

Migrant Workers

In the Middle East, migration has gone into in reverse, with coronavirus forcing nearly 400,000 migrant workers' return to Kerala, India from the Persian Gulf countries since May. Across India, an estimated 139 million internal and otherwise-invisible migrant workers lost their accommodation and were forced to return *en masse* to their original villages, many making journeys on foot and over 300 perishing due to the lockdown from starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care.

A situation was recorded in Tunisia, whereby expats from Côte d'Ivoire were forced into the streets when unable to pay rent due to pandemic-related job loss. Xenophobia and outright racism also reared its head in China, where Africans living in Guangzhou were kicked out of hotels, barred from returning to their homes, or even being forcibly evicted.

Ethiopian and other African migrant workers were expelled *en masse* from war-torn Yemen in February, as the global effects were being felt. In the ensuing weeks, news began to leak of their mass confinement in remote, undisclosed and inhuman conditions in Saudi Arabia through the COVID crisis. Their estimated number of 16,000 was spread across several mass-prison-like facilities. Despite some diplomatic and journalistic efforts to seek their release and/or repatriation, they remained incarcerated at least through the month of September.

Figure 4: Ethiopian migrant workers held in mass confinement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, September 2020. Source: The Daily Telegraph.

Domestic Workers

According in formation received in the VDB, the situation of domestic workers has varied even within a single country. As unregulated as their employment conditions may be, some local workers welcomed being let go during the lockdowns to reside with friends or family, as long as their salary was guaranteed. However, for many domestic workers, their accommodation is tied to their employment and, when dismissed during the pandemic, they also lost their housing.

In Lebanon, which had already been dealing with a devastating economic crisis before the pandemic hit, middle- and upper-class households that suddenly could not afford to pay their foreign domestic workers have taken to unceremoniously sending them into the streets in two well-publicized incidents, accompanied by public displays of xenophobia.

Slum Dwellers

The COVID-19 crisis in South Africa has accompanied a government push for the "de-densification" of informal settlements. Instead of fostering in-situ upgrading and ensuring hygienic conditions, the government has opted for investing in so-called Temporary Relocation Units (TRU) that further increase vulnerabilities and uncertainties among informal settlement dwellers. Many inhabitants and critics have likened this policy to apartheid-era "removals," and the VDB features the attempt to "de-densify" Stjwetla informal settlement in Alexandra, Johannesburg, as an example.

In South Africa, no-one may be legally evicted from her/his home, or have her/his home demolished, except after considering all the relevant circumstances. The central government regulated evictions and demolitions during the COVID-19 pandemic through a Risk Adjusted Strategy that set conditions according to five "alert levels," ranging from full lockdown at alert-level 5, which commenced country wide on 27 March 2020, to "normal activity with precaution" at alert-level 1. Since 1 June 2020, the country has remained at alert-level 3, which is characterized by "extreme precaution to limit



transmission and outbreaks, but with the resumption of limited economic activity."

At alert-level 5, the execution of any eviction was prohibited, whether or not the court authorized it. The prohibition was the result of a 20 March 2020 appeal by 20 social justice organisations to the president's National Command Council for a nation-wide moratorium on evictions during lockdown. Courts were then also prohibited from issuing any eviction orders at all, even if the date of execution was stayed until after the end of the lockdown period. At alert-level 4, courts were permitted to issue eviction orders, but execution was stayed until after the lockdown. At alert-level 3, the execution of eviction orders remained prohibited, except where a court decided that it was just and equitable for the order to be executed.

Despite these measures, the VDB has recorded at least 3,688 victims of multiple housing rights violations involving forced eviction, mostly in informal settlements. In two cases, the City of Cape Town demolished at least 49 shacks in Khayelitsha Township in April, following the punitive demolition of five homes in the eThekwini Municipality at the end of March.

It is often difficult to distinguish between individual and community evictions. The Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) reported numerous violations citing also utility cut-offs of households that lost their income during the pandemic and fell into arrears on water and electricity bills, which, in turn, deepened inhabitants' vulnerability to infection.
Kenya also had put in place judicial protections against forced evictions, but exceptions prevailed. Despite an order from a Kenyan High Court halting demolitions in an informal settlement in Nairobi, authorities evicted and demolished the homes of over 7,000 people since April. This included 5,000 at Kariobangi alone, ostensibly to make way for construction of a World Bank-financed sanitation facility.

During COVID-19, Brazilian local authorities have evicted numerous families in São Paolo, leaving them struggling to stay safe in what is the pandemic's second-most-hard-hit country in the world. In Rio de Janeiro, a favela-based Catalytic Communities project, RioOnWatch, has monitored forced evictions and other violations of housing and land rights in the city's informal neighborhoods throughout the pandemic. The RioOnWatch contributions to HLRN's VDB have revealed an unbroken pattern of particularly cruel evictions, despite a Supreme Court-ordered ban on evictions during the public-health emergency.

Evictions have been taking place also in Colombia: The Bogota Mayor's Office and Colombian Public Forces evicted several families from their homes in May at Altos de la Estancia, while authorities claimed that allowing them to remain would put them at risk of landslides. In the middle of the pandemic, local-government authorities there chose instead to put these newly homeless families at risk of contracting the coronavirus, leaving them no other place to live and offering no assistance.

In Haïti, the mayor of Cap-Haïtien, Minister of Justice and Public Security ordered a major police operation to demolish the Shada2 quartier of Village de Dieu, issuing an ultimatum for residents to clear out within 72 hours to avoid becoming "collateral damage" in the operation targeting notorious local gangs. In the midst of the pandemic, a population daily struggling to survive faced public servants as one more existential threat. The government's eviction order did not provide for any palliative measures such as alternative housing or any effort by the Haïtian state to guarantee the human rights of people who would be forced to leave their homes during the pandemic. The vulnerable and neglected working-class neighborhoods, without drinking water, electricity or other basic services, have long been the bloody theater of police and bandits. Now, Shada 2, home to thousands, has become a field of ruin.

This phenomenon amid the complex crisis of poverty, environmental disaster, state failure and crime has not been unique in Haïti, or in the world. For Haïti, the case of Shada 2 counts as only one of a series recorded in the VDB during the pandemic, displacing and dispossessing over 40,480 Haïtians this year.



Figure 5: A view of Shada before the demolition. Source: Meds & Food for Kids.

Rural People

Not all COVID-19 pandemic-era habitat human rights violations have been in urban centers. While rural inhabitants have increasingly become affected by the virus, large-scale infrastructure projects, land-grabbing, logging, extractivism and other development-premised activities have caused violations and increased vulnerabilities, despite the global emergency.

Since March 2020, when COVID-19 was spreading from its nearby source, the provincial government of China's eastern coastal Province of Shandong exemplified this trend by razing villages in the name of "rural revitalization." The policy is officially known as "village mergers" (合村并居 / *hécūn bìngjū*) in Shandong, and euphemized as "new rural communities" (农村新型社区 / *nóngcūn xīnxíng shèqū*) elsewhere. The China-wide policy targeting 250 million, history's largest case of forced population transfer, seeks to remove rural communities to mass housing complexes. Such new communities are created by razing multiple natural villages and densifying residents into centralized high-rise complexes surrounded by fields.

For example, Jiazhou City, outside of coastal Qingdao, is in the process of erasing 460 villages to be consolidated into 82 central villages by the end of 2020. Linyi County, in Dezhou City, is razing 417 villages, with only 31 villages qualifying for special preservation. Dezhou City alone has designated a total of 5,060 villages for destruction, forcibly evicting and concentrating about 2.7 million rural residents.

Though central government directed, many local governments in China have taken a "demolition first, resettlement later" approach, causing villagers to lose their homes without alternative accommodation. Villagers who have refused to sign compliance agreements have been subjected to intimidation, forced demolitions and beatings. Parents staying behind at home have faced harassment in the form of digging up their fields, destruction of crops, power and water cuts, and vandalism of their homes.



Figure 6: January 15 at Caixi City, Hetoudian Village, densified Longquan Lake Community in Shandong Province Source: Xinhua.

Indigenous Peoples

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples also had advised the UN Human Rights Council and the global public about the way states of emergency during COVID-19 restrictions are further marginalizing indigenous communities and militarizing their territories. This practice augurs a looming trend of land rights violations on the horizon targeting indigenous people who are especially vulnerable. The VDB has captured ongoing violations, dispossessing indigenous peoples of their land, ranging from cases implicating prospectors and ranchers in the Brazilian Amazon to logging and palm-oil investors in Indonesia, to mining and extractivism in Finland's Sámiland. At least one attempt at violent eviction has been reported in Guatemala, where, in April, the VDB recorded private security agents trying to remove Maya Q'eqchi community members from land coveted by private palm-oil companies operating in the region. In defense against the invaders, the Maya Q'eqchi were left to their own devices.

Also in Bangladesh, eviction has dogged indigenous families of Musroil village in the country's northern Rajshahi District. There, the Catholic Church has been incrementally evicting the community, reportedly to make way for a new convent to be built on Church-claimed land. The land has been the subject of dispute since 2017, when the new pastor of St. Peter's Church reneged on his predecessor's promise that the residents could inhabit the land and the housing built there for them. Emblematic is the case of Mary Biswas, 40, a Paharia Catholic widow and mother of three, who was forced out of her property in Musroil village at the end of February 2020, after church officials padlocked her house.

By May 2020, land in Brazil was the subject of five conflicts per day, a 23% increase from 2018, with 32 land defenders murdered so far in 2020. Vale do Javari, home to the Kanamari people in Amazonas state, was one of the indigenous reserves most-vulnerable to COVID-19 due to contact with wild-cat miners and illegal loggers. Finally in July, a Brazilian court ordered 20,000 gold miners removed from Yanomami Park and ordered the Jair Bolsonaro Administration to devise an immediate plan to stop the spread of the pandemic to the park.



Figure 7: A meeting between Yanomami and Ye'kwana leaders to strategize their defense against land invaders. Source: Victor Moriyama/ISA.

Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons

As noted above, refugees, migrants and displaced persons are among the most-vulnerable groups at any given time, let along during their complex crisis, while now facing a global pandemic. Their plight in the context of COVID-19 became symbolized by the 8 September 2020 destruction by fire of Mória Camp, on the Greek Island of Lesbos. Mória, originally constructed to house 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers, instead hosted an estimated 13,000 at the time of the blaze. It already had earned the distinction, in 2018, as "the worst refugee camp on earth" and, in 2019, was called "a concentration camp on European soil." The Greek government maintains that that the fires were started deliberately by migrants protesting the lockdown imposed due to a Covid-19 outbreak among the camp population.

Rivalling Mória in its misery has been the notorious Rukban Camp of displaced Syrians in a desert no-man's land at the crux of the Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi borders. Tens of thousands of Syrians began arriving there in 2015 after arduous journeys to escape the war in Syria and the so-called Islamic State militias. Within a year, the population grew to some 70,000, but has declined to about 10,000 today.

Physical and weather conditions are insufferable in any season, while the camp remains mostly cut off from relief convoys, and inhabitants have to rely on irregular and costly supplies smuggled in.



Figure 8: Working with two other volunteers, Eutur Nafra (left) demonstrates how to wash your hands properly to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. She is one of a number of women working to raise community awareness on COVID-19 in April 2020 at the Abnaa Mhin IDP camp in northern Idlib Governorate in Syria. Source: OCHA.

Although COVID-19 had been spreading in both Syria and Jordan, no case had been found in Rukban. However, after Jordanian security officials forcibly transferred 10 Syrian refugees there from Jordan's Azraq Camp on 10 August, two of whom tested positive for COVID-19, introducing the disease to Rukban for the first time.

People under Occupation/Colonization

In countries and populations still ensuring occupation and/or colonization, the global health crisis has not seen any let-up in the onslaught of forced evictions, demolitions, dispossession and implantation of alien settlers. Rather, the pandemic has only seen an acceleration in the practice and cumulative effects of the indigenous population's habitat human rights violations in patterns that constitute the serious crime of population transfer in Kashmir, Palestine, Tibet and Western Sahara.

The Palestinians are the perennial subject of housing and land rights violations for nearly a century. However, the current period follows closely the dual periodic reviews of Israel's performance as a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. With these processes concluding in late 2019, local and international civil society organizations successfully argued before the Treaty Bodies that Israel has been operating an apartheid regime applied against the Palestinian people as a whole.

Despite these findings and COVID-19, this quintessential example of latter-day settler colonialism has proceeded apace with Israel's population transfer and dispossession of the Palestinian people. Newly coinciding with the pandemic, however, was the Israeli government's officially announced annexation of the West Bank, targeting its breadbasket: the Jordan Valley. Emboldened by the larcenous Trump-Kushner "Deal of the Century" plan, enabling cross-border organized crime from the USA's White House, this development also unleashed new patterns of illegal settler movements representing each of three new variations of opportunism to grab Palestinian's land, water and other productive resources, burning and vandalizing fields of crops, fruit-bearing orchards and olive groves and killing livestock.



Figure 9: A distraught Palestinian girl looks on as the Jerusalem Municipality's occupation authorities force her father to demolish the family home by his own hand. Source: Land Research Center – Jerusalem.

In real-time, Palestine's Land Research Center – Jerusalem (LRC) mapped the spike in land theft, house demolitions and agricultural sabotage aided by settler movements operating through the pandemic, seeking either to accelerate, preempt or replace the US-Israeli annexation scheme by their own undeterred crimes. Meanwhile, LRC also documented the instances of a particularly cruel Israeli form of punitive house demolitions, which involves forcing owners to demolish their own home, often with the humiliating witness of their own onlooking family and neighbors.

In this same period, Palestine's Human Rights and Democracy Media Center—SHAMS came out with three reports on habitat rights violations amid the pandemic. A SHAMS report on Gaza covered the situation in that occupied territory's more than 2 million largely impoverished population under both pandemic and long-imposed Israeli blockade concentrated within 363 km^2.

While Israel also forecloses about 21% of the land as a "buffer zone," Gaza's population density is the highest in the world at 60,777 individuals per km^2 and with little chance for social distancing. Moreover, Gaza's health sector had been devastated by serial Israeli wars targeting homes, infrastructure, hospitals and health workers, while Israel's tight restrictions on Gazans' movement prevents even many of the most-severe medical cases to reach needed treatment outside the Gaza Strip.

Gaza also endures an unnatural situation combining populations transfer with other habitat-related human rights violations. While the UN had declared Gaza Strip uninhabitable by 2020, three habitat-related factors have made it so: (1) the crime of population transfer since 1948, concentrating Palestinian refugees in Gaza, now more than 70% of Gaza's densified residents; (2) Israeli wells and pumps diverting the aquifer's natural flow to Gaza and (3) Israeli agricultural settlers in 1972–2005 emptying Gaza's main artesian fresh-water basins. These factors have prevented the water-service level required to promote health, and have contributed to a situation referred to as "toxic ecology" or a "biosphere of war."

In a special report on the pandemic period, the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) addressed the Bedouin population of historic Palestine's Naqab (Negev) region, which Israel forces

captured and annexed in 1948 and ethnically cleansed during 1951–53, destroying some 108 villages and village points. Between March and September 2020, NCF's monitoring and documentation of the community's housing and land rights has collected over 70 incidents in which enforcement authorities continued to issue demolition orders, execute demolitions and harass and fines livestock raisers and herders.

The NCF's report notes that the Naqab's indigenous Palestinian population is expected to number about 400,000 by 2030 and, as of 2017, more than 28% of the current indigenous Naqab population (around 86–100,000 people) live in unrecognized villages that do not appear on any official maps. Hence, the State of Israel denies most of them basic services such as healthcare and educational facilities, while all of them lack infrastructure, including connection to the national electricity grid, running water, paved roads and sewage disposal systems. The "unrecognized" status of these villages makes it impossible for residents to obtain building permits, which forces them to live under constant threat of punitive demolition.

The VDB has recorded the ongoing case of Israel's parastatal Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the government's Israel Land Authority (ILA) grabbing the land and ordering the demolition of seven Palestinian villages in the Naqab, in order to plant trees in their place with dubious environmental objectives. By 1 May 2020, JNF bulldozers were reported already to have razed at least 50 dunams (5 ha) of Khirbat al-Watan lands as part of the larger 2,000-dunam (200 ha) clearing operation.

In the same COVID-19 context, Israeli police and the so-called Negev Development Authority, Yoav Unit demolished the Palestinian village al-Araqib village for the 178th time. This Naqab village is deprived of recognition and is under constant threat of displacement and eviction, but, since 2000, has been resisting its repeatedly violent removal by rebuilding. The repeated actions by JNF and ILA seek to push the villagers into despair and displace them from their lands. The latest demolition came just 24 hours before the Israeli government imposed a comprehensive lockdown under the pretext of limiting the spread of the coronavirus and at the time of an ongoing heatwave.

Another territory with a similar chronology of occupation is Kashmir, whose land and people have remained under the multiple alien administrations of Pakistan, India and China for seven decades. The combined example of disempowerment, militarization and land grabbing has characterized Jammu & Kashmir during the pandemic, which crisis has followed India's rescinding of the autonomy of the territory under its administration/occupation in 2019.

The internet blackout and other restrictions on reporting from Indian-occupied Kashmir has allowed only a partial record to emerge. However, the VDB has recorded four major cases of dispossession and destruction of civilian houses during the pandemic, including those households caught in the crossfire of the Indian army and resistance fighters. The 415 identifiable victims in these cases are considered to tell only a fraction of the story, as the country comes under a new wave of demographic manipulation and population transfer, variously evoking contemporary analogies with Palestine and epitomizing the interplay of the epidemic and conflict.



Figure 10: Kashmiri women grieve near the residential buildings damaged during a gun battle in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, 19 May 2020. Source: Associated Press.

Tibet and East Turkestan (Xinjiang) have remained distinct countries and peoples firmly under the People's Republic of China since their annexation beginning in the mid-20th Century. The case of East Turkestan's Uyghurs has gain notoriety in the recent period because of China's concentration of about one million ethnic Uyghurs in camps for so-called "re-education." Whereas HLRN has been reporting on housing and land rights issues in Xinjiang/East Turkestan for more than a decade, its Solidarity Network initiative has been dedicated to comparative analysis and mutual understanding of habitat-related human rights issues among all peoples under foreign occupation and alien domination.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the occupied Uyghur and Tibetan peoples find themselves at ground-zero, as it were. The Tibetans under China have long been subject to forced rehousing and relocation, however, this year has seen a new development with Han Chinese authorities engaged in an ambitious transfer of rural Tibetans to forced labor camps. Reports recorded in the VDB, including satellite images, indicate that the forcibly evicted and transferred rural Tibetans from their land this year number 500,000.

People Caught up in War

Despite the pleadings of the UNSG and other global leaders, the guns did not fall silent in the COVID-19 era. Four major wars (causing 10,000 or direct violent deaths in the current or previous year) remain ongoing in Afghanistan, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Less-severe wars (causing 1,000–9,999 direct deaths) continue in 11 conflicts this year, with 18 current minor conflicts (with 100–999 direct violent deaths) and 15 ongoing skirmishes (<100 such deaths).

In Syria, 2020 started with 900,000 citizens newly displaced from the war in the northwest of the country, as government forces had taken towns in Aleppo Province and Russian and Syrian government bombing concentrated displaced families in Idlib Province, left desperately overcrowded and vulnerable to further attack. A UN spokesperson reported that the displaced persons were "overwhelmingly women and children who are traumatized and forced to sleep outside in freezing temperatures, because camps are full." Health facilities, schools, residential areas, mosques and markets were hit, causing the biggest single displacement of the nine-year-old war, and risking disease outbreak even before COVID-19 spread across the rest of the seemingly indifferent world.

By April, people of Afrin, already displaced to Sherewa and Shehba following the invasion of Turkish forces two years before, continued to be exposed to Turkish military attacks, as well as to the coronavirus pandemic threat. In June, reports emerged of the Turkish military's demolition of the Yazidi

village of Da`ūdiya in the Turkish-occupied Tal Tamr/Rīsh `Aynū (Ra's al-`Ayn) region of al-Hasaka Province, in northeast Syria. The Turkish military destroyed 30 of the 200 houses in Da`ūdiya and bulldozed the lands of ten families in one instance. However, that operation displaced an estimated 300,000 civilians from their homes and has denied them their rights to return and access to their property.

Housing, land and property (HLP) restitution became more elusive during the pandemic for Syrians from al-Ghouta, the Damascus suburb besieged by Syrian government forces in 2018. In late June 2020, the VDB recorded that about 13,000 people of eastern al-Ghouta seeking to establish their property ownership there had experienced "real estate chaos" that caused disputes, manipulated prices and denied property rights. This has been understood as part of the government's punitive measures against the local population, with the local property records removed to the General Directorate of Cadastral Affairs in al-Mazza area in the capital.

Yemen is a country devastated by nine years of uprising and subsequent war, where almost three years before the advent of COVID-19, the UN declared Yemen the worst humanitarian crisis on Earth. About 80% of its 27.5 million population, some 24 million people, depend on aid to survive, and millions are near starvation. Economic shocks, conflict, floods, desert locusts and now COVID-19 have created a "perfect storm" that could reverse modest—but hard-earned—gains in food security. COVID recently has sparked a 35% rise in food prices, and only 40% of the currently pledged aid has been received to date.

In addition to the 3,900,00 Yemenis (13% of the population) displaced by the war, another 750,000 are presently at risk on World Habitat Day 2020, as the war shifts to the gas-rich Mārib region. However, the housing and land rights violations in Yemen today are also cumulative, as the previous regime of `Ali `Abdullah Ṣālih already had left an untold number of citizens dispossessed of properties. Of the cases reported with credible numbers of victims from the former regime's land grabbing and dispossession, some 380,00 are recorded in the VDB, and these and uncounted others remain without remedy.

This year, the VDB also has captured cases of housing and land rights violations due to conflicts that fall outside the usual categories of declared or formally recognized war and military skirmishes. Notable in the context of the global pandemic is a series of four major attacks on civilians in Mocímboa da Praia, Mozambique by jihadist militants known by a contrived Arabic name, Ahlu Sunna wa-Jamo/Ansār al-Sunna (al-Shabāb), operating in the historically neglected and now potentially fossil-fuel-rich region since 2017. Although most press and government reports do not put numbers on the victims, except for the tens of persons killed, estimates of the evicted and dispossessed exceed 250,000 since March 2020 alone.

People Subject to Privatization and Financialization

Before the pandemic, the concentration of wealth and disparities in incomes were already greater than in the Gilded Age a century ago. Now, what evolved as a global health crisis in the form of COVID-19 is now also a complex economic and financial crisis of historic proportions. The growing divide between renters and owners in economic and financial crises is only exacerbated in the current pandemic.

Much of the housing policy focus during the pandemic has rightly addressed the emergency of people who have found, or will find themselves insecurely housed or homeless. While this segment of the

tenant and mortgage-paying population and, as noted above, especially minorities face further threats to their tenure security, another stream of commentary has speculated on a likely fall in property values. This looms at a time of already-unprecedented privatization and financialization of public goods and services, generally, but especially housing that has been subsidized or otherwise publicly supported to ensure housing—even adequate housing—for low-income households. While the remaining public housing options may be temporarily protected from eviction actions, the burgeoning loss of publicly supported housing options has left increasing numbers of low-income residents at the mercy of large private landlords, including the growing phenomenon of extraterritorial investors and transnational corporations.

One example is the DAX-listed real-estate trust Vonovia, a product of German social-housing sell-offs to financial investors. Vonovia transformed such housing into assets on the global financial market, extracting the rents and reinvesting little or nothing to maintain or improve habitability. After the German recovery from the previous (cyclical) financial crisis in 2008, big investment funds brought their housing corporations to the stock exchange, accelerating the ownership- and capital-concentration process. Vonovia now ranks as the largest private landlord in Austria and Sweden, and has a significant stake in housing in France. On 26 June 2020, it announced a further expansion to The Netherlands.

Seasoned observers across Europe foresee the growing power of this and other transnational corporate landlords typically increasing rents to maximize profits. Coupled with calls for rent moratoriums during the pandemic, tenants and critiques demand Vonovia re-distribute its high-rent extractions through rent caps and rent reductions, climate-just housing renovations and a solidarity fund to support the long-dwindling stock of social housing.

Husby, one of the most-disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Stockholm, the Swedish capital, has been heavily stricken by the coronavirus. Yellow flags hang out of Husby residential buildings, symbolically accompanying tenants' demand for an abolition of rents. Typically, when tenants are forced to economize, they always prioritize rent, since the alternative to secure housing would always be worse and more costly to health and other aspects of wellbeing, and not only in the chill of the fast-approaching Swedish winter. The demanded rent relief would enable tenants to meet other vital needs during the pandemic.

In 2019, Vonovia bought the portfolio of Husby properties from Blackstone, right around the time the UN SRAH accused that global landlord of deepening the world's housing crisis. Like Blackstone before it, Vonovia only carried out some renovation of Husby flats after a tenant had left an apartment, and then flipped it back on the rental market at a rate 40% higher than before.

Capital was then invested in so-called "modernization," standardized insulation projects that, in Germany, enabled huge rent increases. After many protests and changes of this loose regulation in 2018, Vonovia decided to stop the large works on insulation and shift the method to limited renovations of single, empty apartments for new leases at hiked rents.

Politicians reacted and introduced stricter regulations such as a rent cap in Berlin. However, partly because corporations like Vonovia cannot increase rents much higher than wages forever, they are forced to grow and expand extraterritorially to satisfy their shareholders and capital markets. As German renter advocate Knut Unger explains, "Therefore, they are very keen to scale-up their financially optimized industrial model and extend it to the former social housing estate in other countries."

Against this backdrop, *The New York Times* reported early in the pandemic how Wall Street had achieved a US$60-billion housing grab that has dropped hundreds of thousands of single-family homes in the USA into the hands of giant companies, squeezing renters for revenue and "putting the American dream even further out of reach."

American dreams aside, the pandemic period saw the relatively smaller economy of Lebanon freefall into crisis just before COVID-19 hit. Lebanon's similarly performing neoliberal real-estate market and unproductive rentier economy made housing stuck out as a prime indicator of the country's subliminal decay.

In addition, but related to plummeting popular confidence in the ossified sectarian government system negotiated with the French Mandate before it granted the country's independence in 1943, the full enjoyment of the human right to adequate housing had been impossible due to deep and long-running systemic flaws. These included the high cost of housing relative to wage levels, the mismatch between supply and demand in the housing sector, rising inequality in income and wealth and the economic disparities between areas, the dominance of a real-estate-development paradigm favoring demolition and eviction, and the lack of a national policy or dedicated ministry for housing. For Lebanese, housing and its related costs became precarious with the growing financialization of all public goods and services in a national rentier economy that plunged the state ever deeper into unmanageable indebtedness, especially to predatory sectarian-affiliated and political-party-linked national banks.

Such was the subject of a July 2020 civil society report to the UN Human Rights Council on the human right to adequate housing for the current Universal Periodic Review of Lebanon. Meanwhile, as the pandemic spread and the Lebanese economy screeched to a halt, the specter of eviction lurked for hundreds of thousands. However, no sooner had that report arrived in Geneva, when a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut killed 192, damaged or destroyed 80,000 homes and apartments, and left 300,000 Beirutis homeless. The convergence of crises could not have come at a worse time for the country.

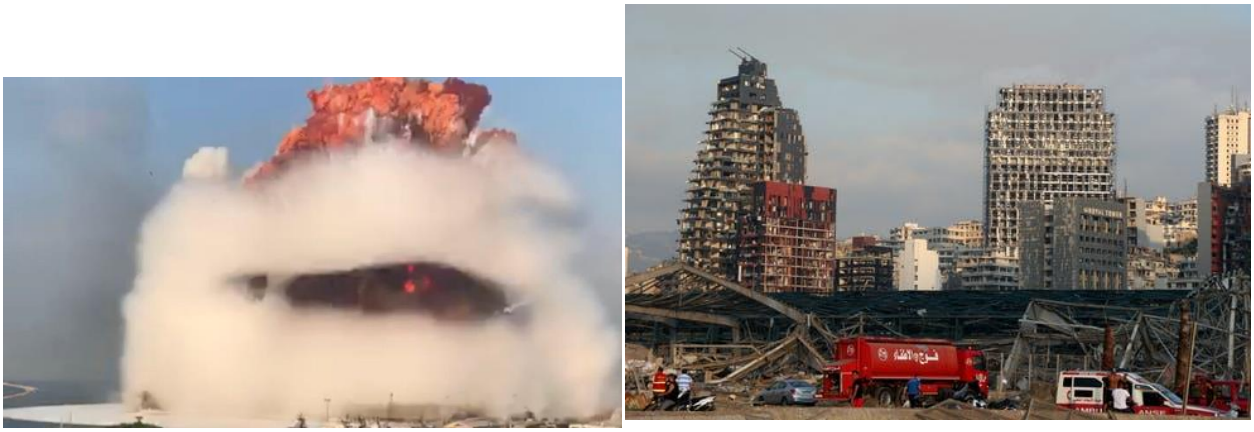


Figure 11: View of the 4 August 2020 explosion of a large amount of ammonium nitrate stored at the Port of Beirut (left). Source: CEO Magazine. The explosion damaged buildings for miles (right). Source: Wael Hamzeh/EPA.

Protecting Each Other

In view of this tableaux of adequate housing, land and other habitat-related human rights violations recounted here and recorded in HLRN's Violation Database, it may be artificial to draw out cases into

tidy categories of social groups and unique circumstances. Indeed, part of the very nature of a global pandemic is its real or potential effect on all of us, in every region and in all circumstances.

As we learn from cases entered into the VDB, we also find such overlapping categories of vulnerability and victimization as in the Indian city of Bengaluru, where "lower-caste" migrant workers found their homes demolished upon returning from their villages after their COVID-19-occasioned lockdown. This coincided with growing concern for South Asia's marginalized Dalit community, which has also been especially hit hard by a combination of contagion, closures and job losses.

In Indonesia, female nurses in Surakarta, Central Java faced eviction ostensibly over fears that they carried the COVID-19 virus from their places of work. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that they were targeted also for their gender as single women. However, the VDB meanwhile recorded a case of male doctors in India who faced forced evictions on a similar COVID-19 premise.

If any universal lessons could be derived from the litany of violations recorded in the VDB, it is that, in a pandemic, everyone is susceptible to the potentially life-threatening virus, but especially those already marginalized and subjected to discrimination in our global society, and needs protection. These fault lines appear no less in the failure to respect, protect and fulfill the universal human right to adequate housing, among other human rights.

However, a review of housing and land rights violations amid the COVID-19 pandemic should not overlook the positive and practical lessons of solidarity and mutual protection that have emerged as well. In the present context of COVID-19, it is also important to mention the vital roles of informal and popular networks in those very vulnerable communities, in particular, community shelter and health networks, in which professionals and volunteers help with testing, provide social support, advise, console, coordinate or even organizes household or community quarantines. The Navajo Nation Department of Health has become a model of service to its severely COVID-affected community, practicing not only resilience, but resistance to the disease.

Resistance in defense of home, land and other means of subsistence, for many, is arguably needed to preserve the first in a chain of elements needed to enjoy a whole bundle of individual and collective human rights, especially for COVID-era survival. A good-practice example is the VDB-recorded case from April 2020 in which Maya Q'eqchi community, in particular, Maya Q'eqchi women, successfully repelled invaders trying to remove the community from its land. Only a mesh of relationships could enable such spontaneous success.

To use the old social science terminology, this is "social capital" at work in the case of "informal community networks" or "social networks"; i.e., spontaneous relationships within and across communities to provide the commonly needed goods, services and other values that the state and its organs (including local governments and local authorities), or the market do not provide under conditions adequate for the members.

As provided in the *HICtionary*, a network is understood to be a social organization whose structure resembles an openwork fabric or composition in form or concept, especially:

- A complex, interconnected group or system;
- An association of people drawn together by common relation or interest;

- An extended group of people or entities with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in informal contact for mutual assistance or support.

The term "social network" was first coined in the 1950s by London School of Economics Professor J. A. Barnes, who observed a social network to be a group of about 100 to 150 people. Of course, depending on needs, objectives and circumstances, your COVID-19 social network could be smaller or larger.

Since networks with a common concern for community often work together with other community networks, or as part of community councils, we could find that community/social networks have become prominent actors at the grassroots to prevent COVID-19 contagion and provide information, basic welfare and needed assistance to households in communities in both urban and rural areas.

On a grand scale, Thailand's Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) mobilizes and supports a community-driven, demand-led COVID-19 program started in March 2020 with a total budget of about THB 144 million (US$4.5 million) to support community networks. The program has been opened to all city and rural community networks to propose funding support for COVID-19-inspired activities to be implemented by community networks. At the end of September, these numbered around 220 city-based community networks (covering more than 4,000 urban poor and rural communities in 1,550 rural wards). As a result, this community-driven COVID-19 program reportedly has become not only an effective way to deal with the pandemic at community and city levels, but also has become an opportunity to strengthen community networks and relationships, bringing communities to cooperate and coordinate effectively with local authorities and other city-development partners. Notably, this model poses an alternative to the VDB-recorded examples of Shandong, China (see Rural People above) and eastern Ghouta (see People Caught up in War above), which apparently have spawned further conflict and eroded local governance amid the COVID crisis.

In the domain of housing policy, it is observed that, as coronavirus widens, so too does the renter/owner divide. Lessons indicate that housing policies will have to reform to address this growing disparity. As COVID-19 spread, outgoing SRAH Leilani Farha also warned that a structural approach is needed for "protecting housing from financialization, and building back a better future."

Learning from each other, as in this global review of housing and land rights violations during the pandemic, lays a foundation for practical solidarity that explores other experiences, engenders empathy and poses alternatives to the harmful practices catalogued here. On this very special World Habitat Day 2020, the UNSG stated that, in the present pandemic, he had observed "extraordinary solidarity, resilience and the best of the human spirit on display." In her World Habitat Day address, UN Habitat's Executive Director Maimunah Muhd Sharif emphasized that adequate housing is a shared responsibility and the COVID-19 crisis poses an opportunity for us to build back better and greener.

These messages leave us with a challenge to validate their hope and optimism. Since we are all in this together, let us learn from the ominous patterns forming around us and come out of this together, better, greener and protect each other. To display the best of the human spirit, respecting, protecting and fulfilling everyone's human right to adequate housing and land is a good way to *re-start*.

Annex: VDB Search Results from 1 January to 5 October 2020



Housing and Land Rights Violation Database

Search results for all type of violation

between 01 Jan 2020 and 05 Oct 2020

Title	Date	Region	Country	Victims	Details	Development	Type of violation
Largo de São Francisco	28/09/2020	LAC	Brazil	600			Forced eviction Dispossession/confiscation
al-Sawiya Groves	18/09/2020	MENA	Palestine	0			Demolition/destruction
al-`Araqib 178th time	18/09/2020	MENA	Palestine/Israel	400	1		Forced eviction Demolition/destruction
ISIS in Vamizi	17/09/2020	AFL	Mozambique	0			Forced eviction Demolition/destruction
Jaranwala Lands	15/09/2020	MENA	Pakistan	30.000			Forced eviction Dispossession/confiscation
Innnesdale/Sokis farm	13/09/2020	AFA	Zimbabwe	0			Forced eviction Demolition/destruction
Romac Farm	13/09/2020	AFA	Zimbabwe	0	1		Forced eviction
Selukwe Peak	13/09/2020	AFA	Zimbabwe	0			Demolition/destruction
Moria Camp	09/09/2020	Europe	Greece	13.000		1	Demolition/destruction
							Forced eviction