

# NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Maggie Ardiente  
Communications Director  
202-638-2535 ext. 108  
mardiente@nlchp.org

## **UN Expert's Report on Poverty in America Highlights the Criminalization of Homelessness as Driven by "Hatred for the Poor"**

*Law Center on Homelessness appreciates UN's efforts to recognize growing problem of fining and arresting homeless persons*

(June 4, 2018—Washington, D.C.) Last Friday, the top United Nations expert on poverty and human rights Philip Alston [issued his official report](#) on his mission to the United States in December 2017. In a press release issued by Alston today, he stated, "Locking up the poor precisely because they are poor, greatly exaggerating the amount of fraud in the system, shaming those who need assistance, and devising ever more obstacles to prevent people from getting needed benefits, is not a strategy to reduce or eliminate poverty. It seems driven primarily by contempt, and sometimes even by hatred for the poor, along with a 'winner takes all' mentality."

"The Special Rapporteur's report adds to a growing record of domestic and international law stating homeless persons cannot be criminalized for basic life-sustaining activities when communities provide no legal alternative," said Maria Foscarnis, executive director of the [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#), which submitted [briefing materials](#) and helped facilitate Alston's visit. "Housing is a human right, and it is shameful that in a country as wealthy as ours so many people are going without a safe and decent place to live."

"This report is the latest in a [series of condemnations](#) of the criminalization and mistreatment of homeless persons in the U.S. by international experts," said Eric Tars, senior attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. "But despite mountains of data, court rulings, and federal funding incentives, criminalization continues to increase as visible homelessness increases. No one wants to see our fellow citizens living on the streets, but when will our officials implement policies that will solve the problem, not make it worse?"

Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty & Human Rights, visited the U.S. in December 2017 and was struck by the "particular callousness" of policies that criminalize homeless persons. Through the assistance of the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, the [Los Angeles Community Action Network](#), and the [Western Regional Advocacy](#)

[Project](#), Alston toured Los Angeles' Skid Row, where he found that "approximately 1,800 homeless individuals had access to only nine public toilets. Los Angeles failed to meet even the minimum standards the UN High Commissioner for Refugees sets for refugee camps in the Syrian Arab Republic and other emergency situations."

The Rapporteur called for implementation of homeless bills of rights, including the [Right To Rest Acts](#) recently introduced in several state legislatures to prevent criminalization. The report states, "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 counseling and job training."

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty's report, [Tent City USA: The Growth of America's Homeless Encampments and How Communities are Responding](#), documents a massive growth of more than 1,300 percent in the number of homeless encampments reported by the media over the past ten years. Another Law Center report, [Housing Not Handcuffs: Ending the Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities](#), cites an increase of 69 percent in laws banning camping in public, 31 percent growth of bans on sleeping in public, 88 percent growth in bans on loitering, and 143 percent on laws banning sleeping in vehicles. Enforcement of these laws costs communities millions in police and court time and incarceration, and puts criminal records, fines, and fees in the way of homeless persons finding housing or employment and being able to exit homelessness.

The UN Special Rapporteur's Report is available [here](#). The report will be officially presented to the Human Rights Council at their session later this month in Geneva, Switzerland.

###

*The [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty](#) (the Law Center) is the only national organization dedicated solely to using the power of the law to prevent and end homelessness. With the support of a large network of pro bono lawyers, we address the immediate and long-term needs of people who are homeless or at risk through outreach and training, advocacy, impact litigation, and public education.*

*[Housing Not Handcuffs](#) is a nation-wide campaign advocating for housing as a solution for homelessness and for an end to the criminalization of homelessness. There are over 600 endorsers of the campaign and counting, including those with lived experience of homelessness, high level public officials, national, regional, and local advocacy groups, law enforcement, and more.*