



UNITED STATES MISSION
TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA
March 31, 2015

Ms. Leilani Farha
Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component
of the right to an adequate standard of living,
and on the right to non-discrimination in this context
Geneva, Switzerland

OHCHR REGISTRY

08 APR 2015

Mr. Léo Heller
Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe
drinking water and sanitation

Recipients: SPB
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Dear Ms. Farha and Mr. Heller:

Thank you for your inquiry of January 6, 2015, concerning the water disconnections in the City of Detroit in Michigan. Please be assured that we are giving your request due consideration. Currently, we are in continuing conversation with the Mayor of Detroit's office to respond accurately to the matters you raised. Below is an interim report based on information from the office of the Mayor of Detroit.

Although there is no justiciable right to water provided in the United States Constitution or federal law, various U.S. laws protect individuals from discrimination in the provision of services. Additionally, there is a widespread societal expectation in the United States that all ought to have access to safe drinking water and sanitation. With this expectation in mind, the City of Detroit is actively seeking to alleviate the water shutoffs to its residents.

In December 2014, according to reports from city officials, water shutoffs ceased for all residents except in 4,000 cases where illegal hookups/usages were found. Since the start of the shutoffs in early 2014, over 21,000 customers have entered into payment plans. This is partly due to the increase in assistance offered through the Detroit Water Fund, which now offers residents assistance up to \$2,000 instead of its prior \$300 to \$1,000 range. To provide further assistance, there has been a \$1 million funding allocation to The Heat and Warmth Fund. Additional assistance will be available in July 2015 through the Great Lakes Water Authority, which, when established, will maintain an approximated budget of \$4 million to offer further payment assistance. These initiatives have been pursued with the aim of assisting residents to make their payments successfully and receive access to adequate drinking water. The Detroit Land Bank (DLB) is working with local lenders, underwriters, and appraisers to increase lending in Detroit so people can afford their homes.

Additionally, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s program, the Philadelphia Homeownership Center (PHOC), has been working with the State of Michigan, Fannie Mae, the National Council on Aging, and most Home Equity Conversion Mortgage Program (HECM) service providers doing business within Michigan to prevent the

foreclosures of approximately 2,000 homes. Detroit's percentage of HECM borrowers in default for failure to pay their bills is 30 percent; the national average is 10 percent. To alleviate this default rate, the PHOC began work with the Michigan State Housing Development Agency in May 2014 to create an opportunity for its Hardest Hit Funds to reimburse lenders for their advances to cover property taxes and hazard insurance payments for borrowers unable to pay.

Detroit city officials are currently working to answer some of the more specific questions in your letter. Please be assured that the federal government is giving this matter appropriate attention and working with the city and state government, as appropriate. We intend to provide you with a more complete report on this matter as soon as we are able to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Harper", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Keith M. Harper
Ambassador

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
Human Rights Council