



**Opening Remarks by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)**

**President of the Economic and Social Council**

High-Level Dialogue on Adequate Housing for All

22 July 2025

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I welcome all of you here – we’re really delighted to have everybody and to be able to welcome you all.

It is a great honour to be co-hosting this conversation with my colleague, Anacláudia Rossbach, who is Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

I think we all know that we are at a pivotal point with the current situation in housing. We have some momentum and greater understanding among Member States around the world about the centrality of adequate and affordable housing. But we also know that there continues to be some resistance because of various rules and regulations. We know that if we can make progress, it will help us produce more inclusive communities — yet we also know that the challenges we face are huge.

The number of people living in really inadequate, unsafe housing or in settlements that are completely informal and have no official status is a tremendous problem. It means that many people who live there are excluded from jobs, from opportunity, from training — and that they are very vulnerable to shocks, to climate change, to extreme weather events, and to displacement and conflict.



Let me start by saying that good housing is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It's hard for people to be healthy unless they are also housed. It's hard for people to escape extreme poverty unless they are housed. It's very difficult for people to do well in school and to feel secure in their schooling unless they are housed.

As we go through each of the SDGs, we see the distinct connection and link to the security and wellbeing that is provided by good housing. We know that where housing rights are protected, communities are more stable and trust in institutions grows. Where they're denied, grievances deepen and recovery becomes harder.

Last year, around this time, I was in Haiti and had the opportunity to spend a few days in Port-au-Prince seeing the consequences of homelessness. There are now 1.3 million people in Port-au-Prince who are displaced — displaced by gangs. Their houses have been destroyed, and they are staying either in schools or in temporary accommodation of one kind or another, with zero safety, zero security, and no sense of knowing where or when they'll be in the next week. That brought home to me the fragility of the lives of people who have no housing.

Sixty years ago or so, I was a community worker in North London, and one of the things I discovered was the number of people sleeping in their cars because they couldn't find anywhere to live that was affordable. So we had to work with the local council and figure out how to allow people to get housing.

When I became a provincial minister and then Premier in the province of Ontario, my first priority was housing — how do we create enough housing so that we don't have homelessness?



Sometimes people say the solution to homelessness is too complicated. It's not too complicated. It's about building more housing and making it more affordable. That's something I was very proud to do — and I'm sure the world will be able to do it again.

We're seeing real progress on:

- Land regularization that secure tenure rights;
- Zoning reforms that dismantle exclusion;
- Community-led upgrading that transforms informal settlements;
- Policy innovations and new financing models that expand what's possible

So, as we move towards the Second World Summit on Social Development, I would like us to put housing where it belongs: at the heart of our vision for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies.

Let's ensure that everyone, everywhere, has not only a place to live, but a place to belong.

I look forward to the exchange today.

Thank you.