



c/o Participation and the Practice of Rights
133 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FG

Minister for Social Development
Nelson Mc Causland
Lighthouse Building,
1 Cromac Place,
Gasworks Business Park,
Ormeau Road,
Belfast, BT7 2JB

20.09.13

Dear Minister,

We are North Belfast residents, some of us with families, who are living in poor housing, some of us for years. Despite our extremely high number of points, and our constant efforts and pleas to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive our families remain living in unsuitable housing; in hostels, living in high rise with small children, living with damp, mould, freezing temperatures and poor conditions.

The answer from the NIHE is always the same – “Your area of choice is extremely high demand.”

Our area of choice is where we grew up, where our families and wider support networks live, where our children go to school and where we work.

As you are aware we have been engaged in a monitoring process on issues connected to our housing conditions for some time and we will be approaching your Department and the NIHE again in due course.

We are living with all of the symptoms of the ever growing housing crisis in North Belfast – overcrowding, poor conditions and the associated poor health outcomes.

We continue to live in unacceptable housing conditions while opportunity after opportunity for addressing housing inequality passes before our eyes: the 27 acre Girdwood site, the 20 acre land at Belfast Harbour, the substantial land available at the former Dunnes Stores on the Crumlin Road, the space in Belfast City Centre such as Frederick Street, and more.

It is unacceptable that car parks are prioritised over the health and well being of our children and our families. It is unacceptable that schemes are being proposed to build new social housing in areas of low demand while literally thousands of people in the neighbouring communities continue to live in dire need.

We are the human evidence of inequality in housing. We are the result of the failure to officially recognise a problem exists. We are living proof of the failure to develop sufficient new build social housing, targeted at the areas and the people experiencing inequality, as was made a legal requirement by the Northern Ireland Act 1998.



Some of us were visited recently by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Patricia – Lewsley Mooney who following her visit said:

*“While I understand the difficulties in the current economic climate, **it is not good enough in the 21st Century for children to have to live in this type of inappropriate accommodation with all the associated risks.**”* [Emphasis added]

Some of us were visited recently by the UN Special Rapporteur for Adequate Housing, Raquel Rolnik who following her visit said:

*“Other population groups, highlighted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2009, which **continue to face inadequate access to affordable housing are Catholics in Northern Ireland, specifically in North Belfast.** The current allocation scheme was created to be fair and open, and to allocate accommodation on the basis of meeting the housing need of people. Despite the efforts of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, I remain concerned that **full equality has not been achieved yet.**”* [Emphasis added]

Both of these prominent figures raised awareness of the fact that for too long people have been forced to live in poor housing and languish on waiting lists in housing stress because of the failure to acknowledge and adequately tackle the housing inequality experienced by people from the Catholic community in north Belfast.

Following the UN Rapporteur’s visit, the Department for Social Development released a statement which said: *“There is no evidence that Catholics in Northern Ireland face discrimination or inadequate access to affordable housing.”* Yesterday we each delivered letters to the NIHE detailing the problems we face and again asking to be re-housed in suitable accommodation, which we have enclosed.

We would appreciate if you could read the letters to better understand each of our circumstances which evidence how we are affected by the inequality in housing in North Belfast.

We would like to respectfully ask you to respond in writing detailing how your Department plans to tackle the long standing, well evidenced religious inequality in social housing in North Belfast which is required by the law.

We believe that as a group of residents directly affected by this issue we have a right to answers and outcomes. We would appreciate an urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

...Signed by residents in housing stress in North Belfast.