The Housing and Homeless Crisis of East Asia (2019)

Human Rights Council

Overview
The family in the picture above live in a two-room apartment, the lower room serving as a kitchen, dining room, living room, and a bathroom all in one, while the upper room, which is less than ten square feet, serves as a bedroom for a wife, her husband, and their four children, one of whom is an infant. These homes are all that the poor people of Indonesia can afford. In actuality, the family shown above, who is one of about 60 million families living in poverty, do not legally own their home as they cannot prove it with any paperwork or land deeds. The government legally classifies them as illegal settlers (LINK). The lack of a home that these families can own has many Indonesian people feeling lost and without a real place in the world. The Indonesian government is doing their best to rectify the homelessness issue, however they do not have enough money to build all of the homes necessary to allow its impoverished citizens adequate housing, which would come to building about seven thousand homes a week, if they are to house all 60 million of their rapidly growing population.

The issue depicted above is standard in most Southeastern Asian States, as they cannot build enough housing to provide homes for their massive populations of impoverished people. The main issue with not be able to build homes does not lie within not having a suitable
workforce to build, but instead in not having sufficient funds. As adequate housing is recognized as a human right to the United Nations, it is now up to the said organization to provide what aid it can to help ease the suffering of the Southeastern Asian Peoples (LINK). (https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/philippines-housing-crisis-filipinos-affordable-homes-190331112948291.html)

Historical Context/Background
In 1977 several southeast Asian countries experienced a tremendous financial crisis, one that was caused in part by the increase of foreign investment in local economies which led people to spend more money than they did not truly possess. Big businesses also started to spend more money, and soon, the currency of several Southeastern Asian states dramatically lost in their value. Thailand and Indonesia were hit the hardest as their currencies were weakened almost to the point of collapsing; the same occurred in South Korea. As shown in the picture to the side, these currencies had sharp declines in value compared to that of the United States Dollar. In response to the crisis, the internal community raised a total of 118 million dollars, and they poured that money into rebuilding the economies of the affected Asian countries, Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea were but a few. Outside forces such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) rebuilt their economies and left them stronger than before the crisis.

Although the economies of Southeastern Asian states are making recoveries from the financial crisis from 1997, these nations cannot keep up with the population growth. For as the population in these countries grows so too does the number of impoverished citizens that are without adequate housing. A large part of these causes of homelessness is not only the inability to find housing but the inability to pay for it. Most of the homeless population of Southeastern
Asia are incredibly destitute and cannot raise themselves out of poverty, for their governments can only give what help they can afford to, which at present is not much.

Current situations/ Recent Developments

Currently, about a billion people in Southeastern Asia live in less than adequate housing and are often unable to afford better housing. Organizations like Habitat for Humanity are crossing the borders to not only build suitable housing but also to build communities where people can live and thrive. While unable to completely fix the problem, these organizations are helping to promote human rights and help people around the world until the governments of the people they are helping can find a more permanent fix to the problem. The HDI’s (Human Development Index) of these countries have not been generally affected, some have even increased during this housing crisis, for Indonesia has risen from 0.689 in 2016 to 0.694 in 2018, Additionally Thailand has risen from 0.740 in 2016 to 0.755 in 2018. The average life expectancy of both States was below the global average (63 years) in 2016, but they have risen in 2018, more information on these factors can be found at the following websites, Life Expectancy in 2016, HDI Of Southeast Asia in 2016, HDI Of Southeast Asia and Life Expectancy in 2018. There is no known direct correlation between homelessness in Southeast Asia, for both life expectancy and Human Development Indexes have risen over since 2016, however no data has yet been published for the year 2019. However, homelessness has caused many social issues between the government and its people who feel abandoned and cast aside by their governments to lack response (NPR). This has caused many rebellions in many of the Southeast Asian states, more information about this rebellions and riots can be found here: NPR.

(https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/)
**Involved Actors**

**Southeast Asia**

The following countries are a part of the region of Southeast Asia and are gravely affected by homelessness and suffering from not enough suitable housing. The cause of their governments' inability to solve this problem has to do with more emphasis and property on education. It is also because the governments themselves do not have enough money to build enough suitable housing for the rapidly increasing population.

In Indonesia, there is an absence of politicians who genuinely care or have the will to do something in regards to the shortage of adequate housing. This “… lack of political will…” has resulted in the absence of rules and regulations regarding adequate housing ([The Asean Post](https://theaseanpost.com/)). The government of Indonesia has yet to produce any adequate system to create housing for their homeless population, and private businesses are unwilling to build homes for these people as the total profit from this project would be too low. Even though the government is underfunded, the President, Joko Widodo, has come up with a plan called, “One Million Houses,” a plan in which he lowered the standards of living in order to create more affordable housing ([The Asean Post](https://theaseanpost.com/)). This plan may cause more harm than good, for it is promoting affordable housing and not quality housing, despite goals of their plan, the Indonesian government still needs to build over 14 million houses ([The Asean Post](https://theaseanpost.com/)). Most currently, Indonesia has resorted to promoting smaller two-child families in order to better control their population ([The Asean Post 2nd Link](https://theaseanpost.com/)).

In The Philippines, the government is trying to get a head start on their ten-year plan to build over 6 million homes for its desperate population by allocating over five billion dollars a year to complete their goal according to Business Mirror ([The Asean Post](https://theaseanpost.com/)). As referenced in the opening section of this topic guide, many of the citizens that are affected the most by the lack of adequate housing are living in slum-like neighborhoods with unsanitary living styles. In addition to this these impoverished people have been classified as illegal settlers due to not officially owning any property ([LINK](https://theaseanpost.com/)).

In Cambodia, the need for suitable low-income housing has increased as more and more of its population move toward cities to find work and housing. It has been estimated that in order to adequately house its population, it will need over 1 million houses built in the next ten years as the population increases ([The Asean Post](https://theaseanpost.com/)). However, there have been issues with forced
eviction in the capital cities slums, as the government is forcing their citizens to make way for new and better housing (NPR). However, it is unclear whether those people will be allowed to stay once renovations are completed, which is unlikely, or if they will have to find other accommodations.

The United Nations

The United Nations firmly believes that suitable housing is a human right. The United Nations has given the elements and definitions of what adequate housing is, these are listed in the following section and click on this link for more information regarding the United Nations definitions of suitable housing.

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx

UN Resolutions and Activities

In the heart of the capital of Cambodia, manual laborers have been filling the Boeung Kak Lake with sand and water in an attempt to force the residents to leave the area so Chinese investors can claim the land and develop it. In the picture to the right; a man by the name of Cham Phutisak is in the water is attempting to collect all of his belongings from the ruins of his water-filled home. These attempts of forced eviction are explicitly against the conditions of suitable housing laid out by the United Nations. These attempts by the Cambodian government to forcibly evict its people has sparked riots and protests at many government institutions and has even resulted in protesters clashing with the police (NPR). Many protesters and others who are affected by these Forced Evictions have started to beg the United Nations for help (NPR).

The Conditions of Suitable Housing that come from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment n°4:

1. Legal security of tenure
a. All persons should have some protection against forced eviction and threats and harassment of any kind.

2. Affordability
   a. The cost of living should not impede the ability to afford other goods necessary to live (food and water)

3. Habitability
   a. Adequate housing should be habitable and free from known dangerous elements.

4. Availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure
   a. Occupants need to have access to functions such as being able to cook and properly dispose of waste

5. Accessibility
   a. All different minorities and types of people must be taken into account when housing is developed.

6. Location
   a. The location of housing must have access to groceries, health care, schools, etc…, and it must be a safe distance from pollution sources and sites.

7. Cultural adequacy
   a. Housing should not be offensive to any way of life, including cultural identities

For more information on the activities of the United Nations click on this link, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx

Questions to Consider

1. Does your country agree with the United Nations that adequate housing is a Human right?
2. If your country does agree that adequate housing is a Human right, what could your country do to help the States of Southeastern Asia?

3. If your country does not agree that adequate housing is a human right, would your country also agree that the homeless population of a State is an internal affair that does not require any actions by the United Nations?

Further Resources

- [https://www.thebalance.com/what-was-the-asian-financial-crisis-1978997](https://www.thebalance.com/what-was-the-asian-financial-crisis-1978997)
- [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/ForcedEvictions/Pages/Index.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/ForcedEvictions/Pages/Index.aspx)
- [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx)
- [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx)
- [https://undocs.org/A/CONF.70/15](https://undocs.org/A/CONF.70/15)
- [https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.44.6.800](https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.44.6.800)
- [https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/asian_financial_crisis](https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/asian_financial_crisis)
- [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx)
- [https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/](https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/)
- [https://www.frbsf.org/economic-research/files/Panel_Heng.pdf](https://www.frbsf.org/economic-research/files/Panel_Heng.pdf)

Images In Order of Appearance:

- [https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/](https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/)