



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE



SUBMISSION

to the

Department of Human Settlements

on the

**DRAFT WHITE PAPER FOR HUMAN
SETTLEMENTS**

28 February 2024

1. Introduction

The Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the **Draft White Paper for Human Settlements**. We commend the Department for responding to existing policy and legislative gaps and thus concluding in the Draft White Paper that “the current housing policies and legislation are lacking in the endeavour to provide sustainable human settlements.” We hope that the stated policy vision of the Draft White Paper of a “transformed housing and human settlements dispensation for sustainable socio-economic growth and improved livelihoods” will not only translate into providing roofs over people’s heads but, as Pope John Paul II stated, a “place where a person creates and lives out his or her life”.ⁱ

It is not in our purview to make a comprehensive technical submissions on the draft policy, but we would like to take this opportunity to make some general comments.

2. Support

We support the broad ideals espoused in the Draft White Paper to:

- progressively realise the constitutionally enshrined right to adequate housing, especially the right to adequate housing for poor households and low-income to medium-income households;
- clarify the role of municipalities in the provision of housing;
- simplify the voluntary and involuntary sale of state-subsidised housing;
- develop mechanisms to increase access to affordable, well-located land, including through the rapid release of public land, and by zoning adjustments; and
- find feasible, fair and justifiable means to expropriate land for much-needed human settlement development.

These policy ideals, if realised, will go some way in restoring the dignity of those who are often on the margins of society. Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the Catholic Church’s social teaching. In his encyclical (official letter) *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*,ⁱⁱ Pope Francis wrote:

“The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all. As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that

every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development.”

3. Timeframes

While we acknowledge that this is a draft policy proposal, the lack of clear timeframes to realise the ambitious agenda the Department has set itself to transform the human settlement dispensation is worrying. The urgency for access to adequate housing cannot be overstated and, as such, attaching timeframes for the realisation of the proposed policy interventions will be a clear statement that the government is serious, as the Draft White Paper states, about remaining “steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding the right to adequate housing . . .”

4. Climate Change

It is encouraging to note that the Draft White Paper endeavours “to integrate climate resilience and sustainable development approaches into the planning, design, construction, and operation of human settlements in an effort to avoid the devastating impacts of climate change.” However, the intervention to realise this, the proposed Human Settlements Response Strategy, is scant on detail. Will it draw on the Presidential Climate Commission’s 2022 report, “A Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa”? Clarity also needed on how housing standards will adapt to incorporate alternative energy sources, such as solar energy, and if existing renewable energy solutions will be sustained in future projects.

5. Construction Mafia

It is well-documented that the proliferation of construction extortion gangs, or so-called ‘construction mafias’, has been responsible for severely disrupting the completion of construction projects and service delivery. The Draft White Paper acknowledges that the construction mafias contribute to the escalation of building costs, but offers no plan of how it will deal with this challenge. Understandably, this may be beyond the scope of the Draft White Paper, however some indication of how the Department will work with other actors, especially the police and the intelligence services, to protect its construction projects will be welcomed.

6. Conclusion

The Draft White Paper is an ambitious policy proposal that will require serious commitment by government to build the necessary co-ordination across numerous departments, to foster partnerships with non-state actors, and to find room in the budget to fund the policy interventions.

We wish the Department well in its work in finalising a White Paper.

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ⁱ Paula A. Franzese and Angela Carmella: *Housing and Hope: Private Property and Catholic Social Teaching*. Available online at <http://tinyurl.com/2hvabw3m>

ⁱⁱ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html