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Corporate landlord is abusing tenants' human rights, says UN housing expert

GENEVA (29 April 2020) – Multinational corporate property owner Akelius Residential AB is breaching human rights standards with its aggressive push for housing profits in countries around the world, a UN expert said today.

"Akelius's business model, driven by the desire to maximise profits, has created a hostile environment for its tenants through a severe degradation of housing conditions, higher rents and increased risk or threat of eviction," said the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha.

Swedish-listed Akelius Residential is a prominent landlord with over 44,000 rental apartments, valued at close to \$13 billion in North American and European cities.

Farha said she had heard of many cases where Akelius utilises an aggressive business model which wreaks havoc with people's lives and has told the company its operations in the UK, Canada and Germany are inconsistent with international human rights law on the right to adequate housing.

"I have been told that Akelius purchases apartment blocks, often with tenants already living in them, and then undertakes renovations to communal areas and vacant apartments within the block, regardless of need," Farha said.

"These renovations are a vehicle for Akelius to charge substantially increased rents to both new and existing tenants, enabling it to circumvent vital rent-control regulations which commonly allow for above-control rent increases where modernization works are undertaken."

The renovations have left residents living in unsafe, construction sites for months and sometimes without running water and central heating. "Some tenants have also been threatened with eviction to enable further renovations to take place," the Special Rapporteur said.

"Although it does a lot for charity, Akelius's business model is trampling on the human rights of its tenants, decreasing housing habitability, affordability and security of tenure," Farha said.

"Commercial landlords like Akelius have an independent responsibility to respect human rights, which means that they must conduct human rights due diligence in order to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address adverse impacts on the right to housing," the expert said.

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Ms Leilani Farha is the [UN 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. She took up her mandate in June 2014. Farha is the Executive Director of the NGO Canada without Poverty, based in Ottawa. A lawyer by training, for the past 20 years Ms. Farha has worked both internationally and

domestically on the implementation of the right to adequate housing for the most marginalized groups and on the situation of people living in poverty. Her most recent [report to the Human Rights Council](#) focusses on access to justice for the right to housing.

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