

Rent hikes nail elderly

Tenants' Day to protect rights

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The International Union of Tenants (IUT), a coalition of 54 tenants' associations from 44 countries, of which the OCR is one such member, has set aside the first Monday in October to be observed as International Tenants' Day.

The struggle by tenants to have their rights protected: to prevent illegal actions, arbitrary evictions, being displaced and rendered homeless, to have a descent standard of maintenance and to ensure habitability, affect tenants globally.

South African tenants are under tremendous pressure in spite of the Rental Housing Act 50 of 1999 that revolutionised tenant-landlord legislation. Tenants view with scepticism, suspicion and sometimes mistrust the Rental Housing Tribunals that mediate or hear complaints from landlords and tenants.

Pensioners in South Africa, whose pensionable income has increased by a negligible percentage, have experienced rental increases from 40% to 150%. When a rental increase is granted that a couple in their 80s cannot jointly afford even if they were to hand over their total monthly income to their landlord, the consequences is serious for the old couple and for society.

Tenants have very little or no protection when they complain about maintenance; they are evicted or have to continue living under appalling conditions of disrepair and safety hazard. Another growing trend is the change of ownership that catapults tenants' rental increases to "market-related" rentals. The market is "changed" each time landlords increase rentals by other landlords adjusting their rentals; supported and reinforced by "studies" and reports on market trend of supply and demand. Rental housing is on demand for many decades and tenants do not have a choice in South Africa, Africa, Europe or North America.

Reflection

Tenants' struggle in the cities of Nigeria and Pakistan, in Prague, San Francisco and London is the reflection of Website: www.ocr.org.za

experiences of tenants in SA. The IUT states, "Our governments, irrespective of political habitat often praise rental housing, and say that rental housing is an important and essential component of every well functioning society. But, unfortunately this is too often lip-service!

The share of rental housing is decreasing in practically all countries, often to levels which are way below sustainable levels - as in the region of central and east Europe - to levels below 5 percent of the total stock. How does this reality benefit social cohesion?

IUT regrets that many governments, at local, state and federal level;

- Consider rental housing as secondary to ownership, through different tax incentives that makes ownership economically more favourable - in spite of the fact that rental housing is in many countries often inhabited by low income households,
- Place housing on a level equal to other commercial merchandise, and as such housing is treated under market conditions. This only favours the financially strong households - a minority of households.
- Are of the opinion that the Market and ownership can solve deficiencies such as lack of housing, unaffordability, and insecure legal circumstances. This is unfortunately nothing but delusions".
- "A well functioning society needs a variety of dwellings in regards to size and standard - and tenure, for different needs and periods of a person's life. It must be up to a person's own choice, according to circumstances, whether he or she wishes to own or rent the dwelling" (The IUT Tenants' Charter).

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