

In prehistoric times, groups of humans simply built the shelters they needed<sup>1</sup> for survival—or they competed over land, natural materials, and resources for 40 secure places to live. The 1948 United Nations<sup>2</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" tried to "guarantee" the right to adequate housing (more than four walls and a roof) as part of an economic, social, and cultural right to a standard of living. But in ancient civilizations, land ownership became the base of wealth and power; everyone lived on the land but few people owned or controlled it. The idea of land ownership and private property became even more important in the Middle Ages, when the common people "paid rent" by working for—or giving things to—wealthy or powerful landowners. 45 Through the centuries, it was mostly religious leaders and organizations that recognized an obligation to help the very poor, the needy, and the homeless. But in 50 modern times, there have been few societies where housing was simply given to those that needed it. In some countries, there have been "fair housing" laws to prevent discrimination based on race, nationality, sex, health, age, family form, or economic situation. Even so, in today's world economy, there are many individuals and families unable to find, own, rent, or share the housing 55 necessary for an adequate standard of living.