

# Michael Kihato - The Problem Is Housing

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At the heart of the Arab spring was a lack of affordable housing, a bold statement I read in a [magazine article](#), which went on to say that: *the shortage of affordable homes is one of the underlying causes of the social unrest and the resulting political turmoil that has spread across the MENA region during the Arab Spring of 2011.*

I was initially quite skeptical and thought as many would, this was simplification of a much more complex problem. Further, common sense dictates that it is more about poverty and a lack of jobs. If you have money, you can afford and buy a house. Let us deal with the underlying problem of poverty, and housing the masses will follow.

Well, maybe it is not such a wild notion. There is some merit to singling out lack of housing as a catalyst to social unrest. One is that it has potent symbolism. Houses in a very tangible and visible way capture the life aspirations of people. A man's (and woman's) home is their castle, goes the saying. The "American Dream" has homeownership at its core. The political symbolism is also obvious. This was said of the Apartheid state and its housing policies: *Housing was about control. It was about excluding people from urban areas. It was about regimentation. It was about the administration of deprivation. (South African Minister of Housing, Joe Slovo addressing the Housing Summit, Botshabelo, 27 October 1994)*

Read more: <http://www.housingfinanceafrica.org/the-problem-is-housing/>