

URGENT ACTION

THOUSANDS FACING FORCED EVICTION IN GHANA

Thousands of people living and working next to railway lines in Accra, Ghana face imminent forced eviction to make way for the redevelopment of the railway system. Known as the Railway Dwellers, the men, women and children who live and trade in kiosks and small structures built along the railway lines face homelessness and destitution if they are forcibly evicted from their homes following a renewed eviction threat on 21 January 2011.

On 21 January 2011, officials from the Accra Metropolitan Authority (AMA) and Railway Development Authority visited communities along Accra's railway lines. They took measurements of the distance between structures and the little-used railway lines and issued fresh eviction notices to those people living within 160 metres of the tracks.

The eviction notices did not tell people the date that they would be evicted. However, the Chief Executive of AMA stated that the AMA would ensure that homes and businesses were demolished in order for construction work to begin in February. On 25 January, buildings were painted with the words "Remove by January 25 2011 by AMA". The evictions are part of nationwide plans to revamp Ghana's railway network following the signing of a US\$6 billion contract with a Chinese company for the construction and expansion of railway infrastructure and as part of Ghana's "Better Ghana Agenda" which aims to improve living standards for all Ghanaians.

Many of those at risk of eviction simply have nowhere else to go and will be left homeless and destitute if the eviction goes ahead. Some residents have lived along the railway lines in Accra for over 17 years. The authorities have failed to put in place legal protections and other safeguards to prevent forced eviction such as consultation with the affected residents. They have not provided any alternative housing to residents, and have no plans to do so after the evictions. These are all required under Ghana's international human rights obligations.

The visit follows announcements on 1 December 2010, by a van with a megaphone, that residents of the same areas had two weeks to vacate their homes and businesses or else they would be destroyed. That eviction did not take place.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Calling on the Chairman of the Railway Development Authority and the Chief Executive of Accra Metropolitan Authority to immediately halt the planned demolition of structures along the railway lines in Accra,
- Urging them to adopt a moratorium on all evictions until all necessary safeguards are put in place to ensure that evictions are carried out in accordance with international and regional human rights standards, including the development of a resettlement plan to provide adequate alternative housing to residents.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

Chief Executive of AMA
Hon. Dr. Alfred Vanderpuije
Accra Metropolitan Authority
P.O Box GP 385
Accra, Ghana

Fax: +233 302 667299

Email: accrametro@ama.gov.gh

Salutation: Dear Honourable Chief

Executive

Chairman of the Railway Development
Authority, Daniel Markin
Ministry of Transport
Accra, Ghana

Fax: +233 302 689 654

Email: graildeva@hotmail.com

Salutation: Dear Chairman

And copies to:

President John Atta Mills
Office of the President
The Castle, Osu
Accra, Ghana

Fax: +233 302 676935

Email: castle@idngh.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Ghana accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 251/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR28/006/2010/en>

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 1 December, vans with megaphones visited informal settlements located next to railway lines in Agbogbloshie, Accra. The vans ordered people to dismantle their homes and businesses and vacate the area within two weeks. The announcement warned that any structure not removed within two weeks would be demolished. Some structures have previously been marked for demolition with crosses and instructions to vacate by 11 November 2010. On 7 December, the Accra Metropolitan Authority stated on their website that structures along the railway lines in Accra would be demolished as part of nationwide plans to redevelop Ghana's railway system. These evictions did not take place.

The Ministry of Transport and state-owned Ghana Railway Corporation have previously given notice of demolition for structures along the railway of 15 October 2009 and 11 November 2010, but these demolitions were never carried out and residents are still living there.

Forced evictions are evictions those carried out without adequate notice and consultation with those affected to identify all feasible alternatives to eviction, without legal safeguards and without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation.

Under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which it is a State Party, Ghana is prohibited from carrying out forced evictions, and must protect people from forced evictions. Evictions may only be carried out as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored in genuine consultation with affected communities. The authorities must ensure that no one is made homeless. Adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses must be made available to those affected prior to eviction. These requirements apply to all settlements, regardless of their tenure status, including informal settlements. Even when people do not have legal tenure, government authorities may not forcibly evict people from their homes.

Previous demolitions have been accompanied by an excessive use of force by police and other security forces. In September, two people were killed and 15 others seriously injured after police and soldiers used live and rubber bullets and tear gas on a crowd of people protesting against the demolition of their businesses at Canoe Beach in Tema. Residents of the neighbouring Tema New Town were also injured in the incident.

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