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Angola to forcibly evict hundreds of families

Hundreds of families in Angola's southern city of Lubango could be left destitute, as authorities prepare to demolish their homes on Thursday to build a new road.

Local authorities have offered to relocate some 750 families in the Arco Iris area to an isolated area outside the city centre without access to public transport, schools and medical services, water, electricity or sanitation.

The Lubango city administrator wrote to the residents of Arco Iris on 29 June, ordering them to leave the area within 30 days.

"Pushing people out of their homes at such short notice and forcing them to live in a remote area without basic amenities is cruel and unnecessary. It is also in violation of international law, which requires that all other feasible alternatives to eviction are explored together with the local communities," said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Africa.

"Once again, the Angolan authorities are uprooting families without providing adequate alternative housing. They have got to put a stop to the planned forced eviction of the Arco Iris families.

"They need to come up with a decent resettlement plan as soon as possible to provide proper alternative housing to the families affected by this eviction plan," she said.

The Arco Iris families have been offered no compensation or other form of assistance. Prior to the notification on 29 June, the residents had not been told about the local authority's plans.

One of the residents in Arco Iris who wishes to remain anonymous, told Amnesty International that residents are not against the urbanization of the area as such.

"But we want to negotiate the conditions [of the eviction]," he said.

The construction of the new road is part of an urban development plan which was drawn up by the Portuguese but not carried out. After independence in 1975, people began to build houses in the area unimpeded.

The authorities announced on local radio on 1 August that they were extending the deadline for the families to vacate the area from 29 July to 25 August.

This was in order to allow the local administration to complete the distribution of the plots of land, which had only started on 28 July.

Since 29 June, the local administration has not contacted the community. The community tried to contact the local authorities on 25 July but the request for a meeting was rejected.

Forced evictions in Angola have previously been carried out without prior notification or consultation with local inhabitants and have left tens of thousands without shelter.

Excessive use of force by police officers has been a consistent feature of the evictions and several people have been injured.

However, in a landmark step in June 2011, the Angolan government's announced its decision to rehouse victims of forced evictions in the capital Luanda.

More than 450 people whose homes were demolished between 2004 and 2006 to make way for luxury apartments, are to be rehoused from September, the government has said.