

URGENT ACTION

60,000 FORCIBLY EVICTED IN PORT HARCOURT

Rivers State authorities have forcibly evicted thousands of residents of waterfront communities from their homes in the Diobu area of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in southern Nigeria. The area is home to an estimated population of 60,000 people. The Governor must halt any plans for further demolitions and urgently provide relief and ensure access to justice and effective remedies for all those already affected.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Governor Nyesom Wike

Office of the Governor

Government House,

Port Harcourt

Rivers State, Nigeria

Twitter: @GovWike

Your Excellency,

I am writing regarding the deeply concerning mass forced evictions in the Diobu axis of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, which have left **thousands homeless in 10 communities** namely: Elechi Phase 1, Urualla, Ojike, Akwuzu, Afikpo, Abba, Akowka, Nanka, Egede and Soku. When the evictions started on 29 January, 2,000 people in Elechi Phase 1 were rendered homeless while their properties and livelihoods were destroyed. By 3 February, the authorities had expanded the demolitions to the other nine waterfront communities. The ten communities are home to an estimated 60,000 people.

On 19 January, a Rivers State Government Task Force visited several waterfront communities in Port Harcourt and marked homes for demolition. According to the residents, task force officials told residents to vacate their homes within 7 days, that is by 26 January. On 29 January, the Rivers State Task Force and security agents, including members of the Rivers State Police Command, began demolishing homes belonging to the Elechi Phase 1 waterfront community, some with excessive use of force – beating up residents and leaving many injured. The forced evictions have made thousands of women, men and children homeless, forcing them to live in deplorable conditions without access to water and sanitation among other essential services.

The forced evictions have not only violated people's right to adequate housing, which the Nigerian government as a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, has a duty to respect, protect and fulfil, but also negatively impacted other human rights such as their rights to education and health, having left residents in a position of increased vulnerability to Covid-19. Access to adequate housing in times of a global pandemic is critical in protecting people from Covid-19, stopping its spread; and recovering from it. Furthermore, under international human rights law, evictions may only be carried out as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored and appropriate procedural safeguards have been put in place. Governments must also ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction.

I urge you to immediately halt further demolitions and provide emergency relief, alternative housing and effective redress (including adequate compensation) for all Port Harcourt residents who have already been forcibly evicted.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Port Harcourt is the capital and largest city of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is a metropolitan city with a population of over 3 million people. It lies along the Bonny River. Despite being an oil producing region of Niger Delta, thousands of people in the region live below the poverty line amidst inadequate and affordable housing. The forced evictions in Port Harcourt across waterfront communities has affected the lives and livelihood of its residents. The forced evictions followed an announcement by the Governor of Rivers State, Nyesom Wike, in his 2022 New Year message, that the state government would, from the second week of January, commence the demolition of all shanties and makeshift structures in criminal hotspots in Port Harcourt.

Under international law, evictions may only be carried out as a last resort, once all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored and appropriate procedural safeguards have been put in place. Such procedural safeguards include provision of adequate notice, opportunities for genuine consultations and access to legal remedies. Governments must also ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction. In cases where evictions may be justifiable, it is incumbent upon the relevant authorities to ensure that they are carried out in a manner warranted by law and which is compatible with international human rights laws and standards.

Although the Nigerian Constitution directs the state to ensure that adequate shelter is provided for all citizens, this provision is in the Constitution's 'directive principles' and therefore not enforceable in Nigerian Courts. However, Nigeria is a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international and regional human rights treaties which require states parties to realize the right to adequate housing, and to prevent and refrain from carrying out forced evictions.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 April 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Rivers State Waterfront residents (All genders – They/their)