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Urgent plan needed to tackle housing crisis in Haiti

Authorities in Haiti must urgently develop and implement a national plan to tackle the country's severe housing crisis, Amnesty International said today after a child died in a fire that broke out in a camp of survivors of the 2010 earthquake.

According to reports from local authorities and human rights group GARR, a 3-year-old girl died and three more people were severely injured on Wednesday morning in a what is believed to be an accidental blaze in camp Ecole République d'Argentine, in the district of Carrefour Péan in Port au Prince.

Seven hundreds families are living the camp.

"The terrible fire that took a child's life in Carrefour Péan is a tragedy that was long coming," said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International experts last visited Haiti in September 2011 to look at the living conditions of Haitians in the hundreds of camps set up after the 2010 earthquake. An estimated half a million people live in the camps and most are under continual threat of forced eviction.

Problems included severe overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of drinking water which contribute to the spread of diseases. The insecurity of the situation has also led to sexual violence against women and girls.

"In the two years since the earthquake very little has been done to tackle the country's housing crisis, the problem that Haitians quote as one of their main concerns," said Javier Zúñiga.

"Unless urgent action is taken to improve the living conditions of the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children living in make shift camps across Haiti, we can only expect more tragedies like this to take place."