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## **Ghana law change would aid slum dwellers**

Ghana's constitution must be amended to protect housing rights and ensure that tens of thousands of slum dwellers are not threatened with homelessness, Amnesty International said in a document released today.

'When we sleep, we don't sleep: Living under threat of forced eviction in Ghana' describes how Ghana's 4.8 million slum dwellers are often deprived of basic services such as clean water and basic health care as well as having no protection under domestic law to prevent them being forcibly evicted.

"Ghana has signed seven regional and international human rights treaties that require it to fulfil the right to adequate housing but this is not reflected in its domestic laws," said Laurence Amesu, director of Amnesty International Ghana.

"This glaring discrepancy must be urgently addressed. Ghana's government should not make paper promises it has no intention of fulfilling."

The right to adequate housing has been explicitly recognised as a human right in international treaties including several to which Ghana is a party.

Ghana became a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights in 2000.

This treaty obliges it to take "whatever steps are necessary" to realize the right to adequate housing.

The threat to evict people from their homes without measures to ensure that those affected do not become homeless constitutes a violation of this right.

In Ghana most economic, social and cultural rights are set out in Chapter 6 as directive principles which are not enforceable in a court of law.

A 2002 case brought against the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) by slum dwellers facing forced eviction underlined this problem. The judge ruled that "the mere eviction of plaintiffs who are trespassers...does not in any way amount to an infringement of their rights as human beings."

"Forced evictions make Ghana's housing shortage worse and drive more people into homelessness and poverty," said Laurence Amesu.

"People who are forcibly evicted face homelessness and destitution and have no choice but to live in the ruins of their former homes or move to another slum area."

Slum dwellers interviewed by Amnesty International described the fear and insecurity of living in areas marked for redevelopment.

Thousands of people living in informal settlements next to railway lines in Accra are to be evicted to

make way for a new rail system. Some have lived there for more than 17 years.

“One day they will just stand up and come and demolish. Perhaps tomorrow they will come. When we sleep, we don’t sleep,” Coffie Nissar who lives by the railway line in Agboglobloshie slum told Amnesty International.