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Hundreds of Haitian families evicted from earthquake camp

Some 500 Haitian families have been forcibly removed from a makeshift camp in central Port-au-Prince, leaving them without shelter for the third time since a devastating earthquake in January 2010.

The evictions began last week in the area around Sylvio Cator Stadium in the capital's centre, apparently ahead of a major sporting event.

City authorities reportedly paid families US\$250 to move but did not provide adequate notice of the evictions or provide alternative housing.

"Port-au-Prince's Mayor must stop these illegal forced evictions of earthquake victims until adequate alternative housing can be found for all the displaced families," said Javier Zuñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

"By pushing families out in the street for a third time since last year's earthquake, Haitian authorities have failed to protect their rights to an adequate standard of living and basic shelter."

Some 7,000 people had sought shelter inside Sylvio Cator stadium in the immediate aftermath of last year's earthquake. They were forcibly evicted from the stadium itself in April 2010, when several hundred families formed a makeshift camp nearby.

The site is among the six "most visible" displacement camps that Haitian President Michel Martelly has slated for closure.

Port-au-Prince Mayor Jean Yves Jason reportedly visited the camp on 12 July 2011 to inform its residents they would have to leave within three days or face forcible eviction. This was apparently the first time families were notified of the plans, and no court order was shown.

The mayor returned with police on 15 July to begin forcibly evicting the families.

City authorities had designated a small plot of marshland two kilometres away to relocate the displaced people. However, there has only been space to accommodate approximately 100 families there and the site has no facilities whatsoever. It is not known where the other families have gone.

As Haiti is currently in the midst of its rain and hurricane season, families would face further difficulties in constructing shelters on the site.

Across the country, thousands of makeshift camps sprang up overnight after the January 2010 earthquake left hundreds of thousands of people homeless.

More than 600,000 people are still living in precarious conditions in the camps. According to a March 2011 report from the International Organization for Migration, up to 160,000 of these are at risk of forced

eviction.

In November 2010 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked the Haitian authorities to adopt a moratorium on all evictions from the camps and recommended that anyone unlawfully evicted be transferred to places with minimum sanitary and security conditions.

“Eighteen months after Haiti’s devastating earthquake, living conditions in most of the camps are still dire,” said Javier Zuñiga.

“For Haiti’s reconstruction efforts to be successful, much more must be done to speed up the construction of shelters and to restore basic services and dignity to those still living in the camps.”