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Forced eviction in Belgrade conducted with complete disregard for human rights

Amnesty International is concerned about the forced eviction of a vulnerable woman from workers' barracks in Omladinskih brigada Street in New Belgrade on Wednesday 5 October, and the possibility that the remaining 21 people living in the five other workers barracks will shortly be forcibly evicted.

The eviction took place amid appalling circumstances in which Belgrade city officials, accompanied by some 20 police, demolished one structure leaving the extremely vulnerable woman who lived there homeless. The woman – who suffers from a psychiatric illness - was not present during the eviction: her neighbours and family say that she disappeared the night before, when she learned that the structure would be demolished. Her whereabouts remain unknown.

Her mother who tried to prevent the eviction from taking place had to be briefly hospitalized, after she had run from the building in a state of stress and collapsed in the street. She later stated that she did not manage to save even the personal possessions from the house.

Although the other barracks were due to be demolished on the same day, this did not take place, but the rest of the settlement is likely to be evicted soon. Some eight people, including a disabled child, may end up in the street.

None of the affected inhabitants of the barracks was consulted in advance; a formal notice of eviction was served to only some of the people living in these barracks only two days before the eviction. No alternative accommodation has been offered or provided to the families living there, including those with serious mental health conditions.

Activists from several Belgrade NGOs tried to peacefully prevent the eviction by protesting in front of the site. However, according to one NGO, the Regional Centre for Minorities (RCM), city officials refused to talk to them or even identify themselves, although NGOs were able to identify some of those present as city officials. The police formed a line and prevented the activists from entering the site and observing the eviction.

The United Nations' Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development – Based Evictions and Displacement allow that “neutral observers, properly identified, shall be present during the resettlement so as to ensure that no force, violence or intimidation is involved”. However, instead of allowing the NGOs to observe, city officials took a camera from a member of the RCM and deleted all the photographs taken, returning it only after he was instructed to by a police officer. An activist from the NGO Women in Black was also detained in a police station in degrading conditions for two hours because she didn't have her identity card.

Forced evictions are one of the main violations of the right to adequate housing affecting people living in informal settlements in Serbia, particularly in Belgrade, the capital. In April 2011, Amnesty International issued a report on forced evictions in Belgrade, calling for an end to forced evictions. The organization has urged the government to introduce a law prohibiting forced evictions, and ensuring that all evictions are carried out according to international standards. However, no action has been taken to date.

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