

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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USA: Amnesty International calls for eviction notice for residents of Villas de Sol, Puerto Rico, to be extended into 2011

Amnesty International calls on the US Federal authorities to ensure that the eviction notice for the community of Villas de Sol is extended past its present date of 31 December 2010 to allow the community sufficient time to build adequate alternative housing. In addition, the municipal authorities should ensure that sufficient adequate housing services, including water, sanitation and electricity are available at the land to which the community will move. Should the deadline be enforced, the community of over 200 families will face homelessness.

In November, the community of Villas de Sol in Toa Baja signed an agreement to form a co-operative on land given to them by the municipality of Toa Baja in exchange for a parcel of land donated to the residents by Doctor Eduardo Ibarra, President of the College of Surgeons. The land is undeveloped and sufficient time must be given both to the residents to allow them to build adequate housing, as well as for the municipality to ensure that services are available for the community's use before they are required to move to the new settlement.

Amnesty International is concerned that a previous attempt to evict the community was accompanied by an excessive use of force by police, which resulted in injury for a number of residents.

The organization has written to the Federal Emergency Management Agency urging them to defer the present eviction deadline and reminding them of their obligations under international law to refrain from forced evictions.

International law prohibits forced evictions – which are those evictions carried out without adequate notice and consultation with those affected, without legal safeguards and without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation. Evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once other alternatives have been explored in genuine consultation with the affected communities. The authorities then have a duty to comply with procedural protections including adequate notice. The authorities must ensure adequate alternative accommodation and that no one is made homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction. The authorities must provide all victims of forced evictions with access to effective remedies.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being and that of their family, including housing. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Commission on Human Rights, the United States has agreed to resolutions which recognise the right to adequate housing and affirm that forced evictions constitute a gross violation of human rights. The right to adequate housing is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). As a signatory to the ICESCR, the USA is obliged to refrain from actions that defeat its object and purpose, such as forced evictions.

This work is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign mobilises people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit <http://www.amnesty.org/en/demand-dignity>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>