

# SLUMS REPRESENT THE WORST OF URBAN POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Former United Nations  
Secretary-General Kofi Annan,  
UN-HABITAT report 2003

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HUMAN RIGHTS =  
LESS POVERTY

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



**More than 1 billion people across all continents live in slum communities. Some projections estimate that 2 billion people will be living in slums by 2030.**

**Slum communities are growing because of increasing urbanization and unavailability of affordable housing within cities. Poverty, discrimination, internal displacement linked to conflicts, natural disasters and climate change, corporate land grabs and forced evictions also compel people to endure inadequate housing and living conditions.**

**Human rights violations are widespread and systematic in slums. People living in slums around the world are denied their rights to adequate housing, water and sanitation, education and health. They experience violence from the police and criminal gangs. They also live under the constant threat of being forcibly evicted from their homes, in the absence of due process and other safeguards and without being offered any adequate alternatives.**

**If poverty is a human rights catastrophe, slums are its most visible manifestation.**

**Given everything that is difficult about life in the slums, it can be easy to forget that they are also places where people, against the odds, have built their homes and raised their families, established businesses and founded communities.**

**This is what is lost every time a home is destroyed: not just the buildings, but everything a home can be – security, family, health, work and community. As these cases demonstrate, disregard for life in the slum communities too often leads to making a bad situation worse, leaving people with less than they had and with little recourse to justice.**

## ANGOLA

“I ASKED, “COULD IT BE THAT  
THERE ARE NO LAWS  
IN THIS COUNTRY?  
YOU ARE POLICE.  
YOU SHOULD PROTECT  
THE LAW, BUT YOU  
ARE BREAKING IT.””

Amelia André Maneco



Amelia André Maneco with her daughter, Maria Maneco Capasola (standing to her left), Angola, 14 January 2009. Her daughter was born by caesarean section two days before their house was demolished.

Amelia André Maneco has five children and lives in the Soba Kapassa neighbourhood of Luanda, which has faced waves of forced evictions since 2002. In 2005 she returned from hospital having given birth to her fourth child to find police outside her home.

**“They told us to remove our property from our homes so they could be demolished. I asked some police why they were doing this and pleaded with them not to.**

**“My husband, Kapassola, was taken by the police and thrown in the back of a car as if he were a sack of potatoes because he told our eldest child not to leave the house. They accused him of *rebelião* [interfering with police duties] and held him at the station for many hours.”**

Amelia’s brick house was demolished in 2005. She and her husband built a new house from zinc sheets.

**“They didn’t give us any money or any place to move to,” she explains. “They came back again two times that year to demolish our homes and try to move us out of the area.”**

The demolitions have stopped and Amelia and her husband have rebuilt their house with brick. They have never received any compensation for the three times their home was demolished.

⚡ IT IS LIKE  
DUMPING PEOPLE  
TO DEATH...  
EXECUTION  
BY WAY OF  
STARVATION ⚡

Leng Sopheap



A woman salvages wood from her house that had just been demolished in an eviction outside Sihanoukville on 24 February 2008.

Leng Sopheap, a 48-year-old mother of three, was forcibly evicted from her home in Sambok Chab in May-June 2006. She and her family were resettled in Andong.

Sopheap found life hard in Andong. The land was empty and flooded. There were no houses, clean water, electricity, toilets or jobs. She earned less than half a dollar a day selling palm cakes and could not make enough to feed herself or her children. Sopheap, who is living with HIV, also lost access to health facilities on which she depended. She needs to attend a clinic regularly to get free anti-retroviral treatment.

**“Living there was not feasible,” she explained. “This [resettlement] had nothing to do with helping people. They were already poor, now they are more impoverished and miserable.”**

After only a few months in Andong, Sopheap moved back to the city, leaving her children with two non-governmental organizations. She and her partner now squat in the streets near where she used to live.

She has found some work selling sugar cane and sends money back to her children, but does not have enough to rent somewhere to live.

All the poor neighbourhoods where rental housing used to be available have been or soon will be demolished, according to Sopheap, leaving her with few options and little security as she tries to rebuild her life.

**⚡ THE ODOURS ARE UNBEARABLE. THERE IS A SIGN WARNING ABOUT DANGER. THE CHILDREN SUFFER FROM HEADACHES. ⚡**

Erzsébet Fodor



© Amnesty International

Erzsébet Fodor and her partner, Zoltán Koza, both Roma, in Primaverii Street, Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda, Hargita county, January 2009.

Erzsébet Fodor and her family were forcibly evicted from their home in August 2004. They were moved to Primaverii Street, to metal barracks on the outskirts of Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda, hidden behind a waste-water filtering station.

Life in Primaverii Street is incredibly difficult. Erzsébet explains: **“When all the families go to sleep we don’t fit in. We cannot take a bath, we cannot clean ourselves. It is too small.”**

Temperatures in the winter reach  $-26^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The barracks are heated by wood-burning stoves. Fuel is supplied by the municipality but the supply is inadequate, lasting families less than three months a year. When the fuel runs out they burn solid fuel, such as plastic, that they find in the rubbish.

When Erzsébet was forcibly evicted from her former home she was given no notice.

**“They told us we had to come to Primaverii Street,”** she remembers. **“They didn’t give us another option and said that if we do not want to go there we could stay in the street.”**

The evicted families have tried to speak to the authorities about the terrible conditions but to no avail.

**“If we go to City Hall, the mayor doesn’t even allow us to go inside the mayor’s office buildings.”**

KENYA

**⚡ THE WASTE WATER PASSES THROUGH OPEN DRAINS AND SNAILS THROUGH THE COMPOUND AND THROUGH THE NEIGHBOURING HOUSES AND INTO THE RIVER ⚡**

Mama Esther



© Amnesty International

Deep Sea slum in Nairobi, Kenya, 8 September 2008

Some 2 million people live in Nairobi's slums and informal settlements, nearly 60 per cent of the city's total population. Mukuru Kwa Njenga is one of these settlements, located 10km south-east of the city centre in Nairobi's industrial area and home to an estimated 75,000 people.

Residents of Nairobi's slums live with infrastructure and services that are wholly inadequate to meet basic needs. Roads, sewers, water delivery, electricity and street lighting often do not exist. Where they do, they are dangerously substandard.

Mukuru Kwa Njenga is no exception. Mama Esther, a resident there, told Amnesty International:

**"We are about 15 families on this one plot owned by one landlord. Each family rents a one-room house and pays between 400 and 700 shillings [about US\$5-9]. I pay 400 as rent. The room as you can see is single, but we divide it into two so that my three children can sleep in the other section.**

**"All 15 families on this plot use the one pit latrine which you can see outside. There is also one common bathroom which is adjacent to it and whose entry is covered by a polythene bag.**

**"Because we are so many, we have to organize, throughout the day, on how to use the pit latrine and particularly the bathroom."**

# GOVERNMENTS MUST ACT NOW

## ■ End forced evictions

Governments should take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies in accordance with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions.

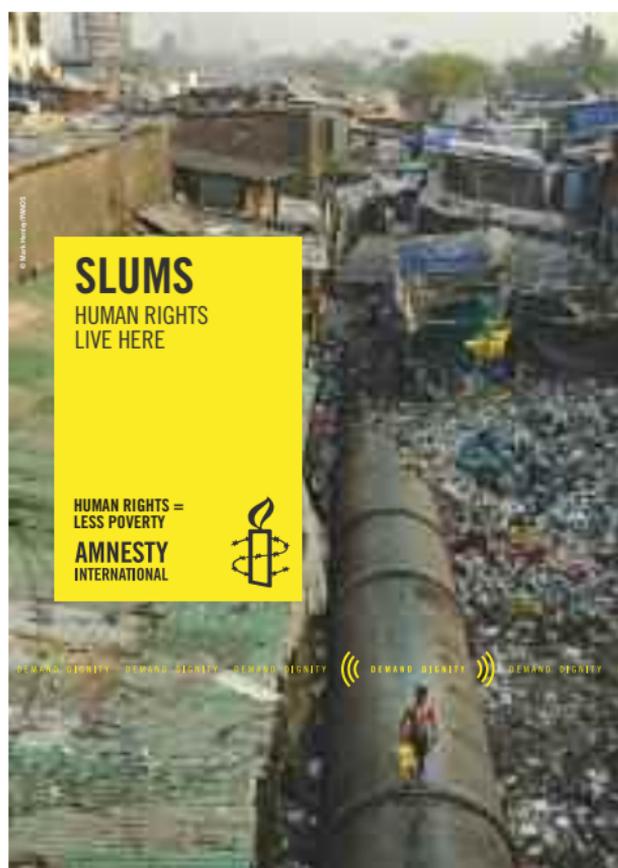
## ■ Ensure equal access to public services for people living in slums

Governments must combat direct and indirect discrimination against people living in slums. Legislation and provisions that have a discriminatory effect must be reviewed, amended or repealed. Governments must ensure that people living in slums have equal access to water, sanitation, health care, housing, education, and fair and effective policing.

## ■ Allow for and ensure the active participation of people living in slums in all plans and projects directed at slum upgrading

Governments must end repression against slum-dwellers and those working with them. They must take effective measures and remove obstacles to ensure the active participation of people living in slums in any upgrading, planning and budgeting processes that affect their lives directly or indirectly. Any upgrading initiatives or housing programmes and policies should be consistent with international human rights standards, particularly on the right to adequate housing.

An Amnesty International briefing, *Slums: Human rights live here*, is available at [demanddignity.amnesty.org](http://demanddignity.amnesty.org)  
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**Amnesty International** is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

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