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Nigeria: Lagos state government must stop wave of devastating forced evictions

New evidence from satellite images reveals the true extent of a forced eviction in Badia East, Lagos – one of Africa’s two megacities. The pictures, taken before and after demolitions carried out by the Lagos state government on 23 February 2013, clearly show that a densely populated area containing concrete houses and other structures was razed to the ground.

It is estimated that close to 9,000 residents of Badia East lost their homes or livelihoods. However senior officials in the Lagos state government had claimed that the area was a rubbish dump.

“The effects of February’s forced eviction have been devastating for the Badia East community where dozens are still sleeping out in the open or under a nearby bridge exposed to rain, mosquitos and at risk of physical attack,” said Oluwatosin Popoola, Amnesty International’s Nigeria researcher.

A new report by Amnesty International and the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) looks at the impact of the demolitions and documents the failings of the Lagos state government

The organisations call for an immediate end to mass evictions in Lagos state until safeguards have been put in place to protect people from forced eviction.

The report highlights the devastating impacts of the forced evictions on the residents’ lives. Many women whose small businesses were demolished on 23 February described how they are now dependent on family and friends for basic necessities. Some said that they are suffering from malaria or typhoid after living in the open but can no longer afford to pay for medicines and treatment.

“The government must immediately provide effective remedies for the violations it has committed and provide all those affected with adequate alternative housing and compensation,” said Felix Morka, executive director of SERAC.

The government has stated that the 23 February eviction was the first phase of its plans to clear out the whole of Badia East in order to ”redevelop” the area. If these plans proceed as described, tens of thousands will be at risk of forced eviction and face possible destitution.

Bimbo Omowole Osobe is a resident of Badia East whose home and shops were demolished. She now lives under a mosquito net and has had to send her children away to stay with family members. They have had to stop their schooling as Bimbo does not have money for fees anymore.

She told Amnesty International:

“Shelter comes first in everything in life, when there is shelter whatever you have you can live with; but when there is no shelter how do you survive?”

Residents of Badia East say they were given no notice about the eviction – which was carried out with bulldozers and armed police. The community had no time to salvage any belongings from their homes before the demolitions began.

The Lagos state government has given completely contradictory accounts of the eviction.

While the Lagos state Attorney-General acknowledged that people had been evicted when the area had been cleared, the Lagos state Commissioner for Housing told Amnesty International in a meeting that the area cleared during the demolition contained no houses and was just a rubbish dump.

Amnesty International has commissioned satellite imagery that clearly exposes this as a fabrication. A photograph taken before the demolition on 8 February 2013 very clearly shows high density structures which contrasts markedly with a later image, taken on 8 April 2013, which shows that the structures have been razed to the ground.

A survey carried out by community members with the support of SERAC estimates that at least 266 structures that served as homes and businesses were completely destroyed, affecting an estimated 2,237 households

“The Lagos state government has failed to comply with national and international law. It is high time that the Lagos state government and the Nigerian government stop forced evictions and enact legal safeguards that apply to all evictions,” said Oluwatosin Popoola.

This situation, and the issues it raises, is unfortunately characteristic of a broader pattern of forced evictions by the Lagos state government. In numerous forced evictions, documented by SERAC and Amnesty International, it has failed to consult people to explore alternatives to eviction, provide adequate notice, legal remedies and adequate alternative housing.

The Nigerian government must impose a moratorium on mass evictions until it has adopted legislation to protect people from forced evictions, which are illegal under international law.