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## **Egypt: Stop forced evictions and consult slum-dwellers to resolve housing crisis**

Egyptian authorities and political parties must put the rights of the country's 12 million slum-dwellers at the top of their agenda if they are to meet the demands for social justice and human dignity championed during the "25 January Revolution", Amnesty International said today in a new report.

['We are not dirt': Forced evictions in Egypt's informal settlements](#), released ahead of the country's first elections since the fall of former President Mubarak, documents cases of forced evictions affecting hundreds of families in the country's vast slums. The report describes how people are forcibly evicted from so-called "unsafe areas" where residents' lives or health are said to be at risk.

"People living in Egypt's slums must be given a say in finding solutions to their dire housing conditions, but the authorities are failing to respect their human rights," said Kate Allen, Director of Amnesty International UK.

"And when slum residents dare to object, they face unlawful forced evictions and arbitrary arrest under repressive laws."

An acute shortage of affordable housing has driven Egypt's poor to live in slums and informal settlements. Around 40 per cent of Egyptians live on or near the US\$2 a day poverty line, and the vast majority of the victims killed or injured during the "25 January Revolution" came from underprivileged backgrounds.

The 123-page report is based on two years' research and documents the Egyptian authorities' failure to consult communities living in "unsafe areas" on plans to address their inadequate housing conditions. According to official sources, an estimated 850,000 people live in areas deemed "unsafe" by the authorities, while some 18,300 housing units in Egypt are at risk of imminent collapse.

Following a deadly rockslide in Cairo's Manshiyet Nasser slum in 2008, the Egyptian authorities identified 404 "unsafe areas" across the country. In Manshiyet Nasser, thousands of families living at risk of future rockfalls were relocated into alternative housing, but most have been moved far from their sources of income and generally lack the necessary documentation for their new homes.

The authorities have routinely failed to give residents proper warning before security forces – including military police in recent months – arrived to force people out of their homes in breach of Egypt's international obligations and its own laws.

Amnesty International found that many slum residents were left homeless when the authorities demolished their homes against their wishes and failed to provide new housing. Research showed that authorities discriminate against women – especially if they are divorced, widowed or separated – in the allocation of alternative housing.

“Government plans for 'unsafe areas' are essentially demolition plans that don't explore alternatives to evictions where possible. Not one person out of the hundreds we interviewed had ever been adequately notified before their eviction or consulted on alternative housing. With elections approaching, Egyptian authorities have an opportunity to right that wrong,” said Kate Allen.

Abdel Nasser al-Sherif's story is emblematic. The lawyer and his extended family used to live in a four-storey building his father built in 1949 in Old Cairo's Establ Antar informal settlement.

In 2009, the authorities announced that a cliff beside the settlement was “unsafe” and life-threatening.

Without issuing any warning or an eviction notice, the authorities decided to demolish al-Sherif's property. After he protested and refused to leave his house, riot police entered and dragged him away.

Al-Sherif's possessions were dumped by a lorry in a resettlement area across the city. He has not been compensated for the destruction of his family's home of 60 years.

Amnesty International also found evidence of communities that had apparently been abandoned under the threat of rockfalls despite asking the authorities to resettle them, while other communities facing lesser risks have been demolished, such as the Al-Sahaby area in Aswan.

This inconsistent approach has spread suspicion among slum-dwellers that some of them are being cleared out of their homes not to protect them, but so that the land can be developed for commercial gain.

The organization also urged the authorities to rethink proposed massive development schemes, such as the Cairo 2050 master plan.

The plan, announced in late 2008, aims to “redistribute” about two-thirds of greater Cairo's projected population of 30 million in the year 2050 into new cities on the outer fringes.

Clearing the capital of its “shacks” to make way for investment projects appears to be an underlying objective of Cairo 2050.

Under the plan, 35,700 families living in 33 “shack areas” in Cairo and Giza, including those in Ezbet Abu Qarn in Old Cairo, would be cleared and moved to new settlements far from their current homes, uprooting them from their places of work.

In its report, Amnesty International addresses key recommendations to the Egyptian authorities, including urging them to review the Cairo 2050 master plan.

“The Egyptian government's first step should go back to the drawing board with Cairo 2050 so that the voices of those most affected can be adequately heard to develop a new plan to deal with the housing crisis in slums and put the needs of residents first,” said Kate Allen.

“The forced evictions must end. Where people are genuinely living in dangerous conditions and eviction is the only feasible option, there must be advance warning, consultation about resettlement, and adequate and prompt compensation. If people's lives are in imminent danger, they must be immediately relocated to temporary shelter before consultations can take place.”

This report is a part of Amnesty International's [Demand Dignity campaign](#) launched in May 2009. Through the Demand Dignity campaign, Amnesty International is calling for an end to the human rights violations that drive and deepen 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.