

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development: no sustainable urbanisation without human rights

Amnesty International calls on the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development to identify concrete actions to provide security of tenure and protection from forced evictions to all people living in slums and informal settlements across Africa.

According to UN-HABITAT, sixty percent of many African cities are composed of slums, much of it on informal land arrangements. As a consequence of their insecurity of tenure, people living in slums and informal settlements are vulnerable to forced evictions and other violations of human rights.

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children living in slums and informal settlements across Africa live under the threat of being evicted without adequate notice, prior consultation and without being offered any alternative housing.

Amnesty International has recently highlighted how over 200,000 Nigerians are at risk of forced evictions and homelessness as a result of the authorities plans to demolish all the waterfront areas in Port Harcourt. The government has not developed any resettlement plan to provide alternative accommodation to the hundreds of thousands of people who will be evicted. Many will lose their livelihoods and be driven deeper into poverty.

Similarly, around 10,000 people are at risk of forced eviction from Ambatta, in N'Djamena, the capital city of Chad. The authorities have not offered any alternative housing and compensation to the residents. Some of them have been living there for more than 20 years. Most work in low-paid professions such as teaching and community work, and do not have an alternative place to live if their homes are demolished.

The majority of Nairobi's residents live in informal settlements and slums, in inadequate housing. The historical failure to incorporate the slums in urban plans and budgets has led to a situation where people have with little access to clean water, sanitation, health care, schools and other essential public services. Amnesty International has documented how the government's failure to enforce legal requirements that landlords and structure owners should provide sanitation facilities has particularly affected women and girls. Inadequate and inaccessible toilets and bathrooms, as well as the general lack of effective policing and insecurity, make women even more vulnerable to rape and other forms of gender-based violence

Sustainable urbanisation can not occur when large numbers of people living in urban settings live without security of tenure, under the threat of forced evictions, in grossly inadequate housing conditions and with limited or no access to public services.

Amnesty International welcomes the focus in the aide memoire for the conference on security of tenure as critical elements in achieving sustainable human settlements. The organisation also welcomes the focus on gender and land rights and on the need for innovative land

management to ensure affordable housing. Many of the steps that are necessary to achieve these objectives are those that government are already required to take to comply with in order to realise the right to adequate housing under international and regional human rights treaties.

Amnesty International therefore urges the Third African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD) to call on all governments in Africa to promote sustainable urbanisation by respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate housing. In particular, Amnesty International urges the Ministerial Conference to call on all governments to:

- Take immediate measures to ensure a minimum degree of security of tenure to all people lacking such protection, in genuine consultation with the affected groups.
- End forced evictions and to adopt guidelines for evictions, based on the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement, and which comply with international human rights law
- Ensure that people living in slums have equal access to water, sanitation, health care, housing, education, and policing that complies with human rights.
- Ensure the active participation of people living in slums in any upgrading, planning and budgeting processes that affect their lives.
- Address discrimination faced by women in access to housing and land.

Note to editors:

This work forms part of Amnesty International's global Demand Dignity campaign, which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. Under the campaign, Amnesty International is calling on governments to end forced evictions, ensure equal access to public services for people living in slums and their active participation in decisions affecting their lives. For further information see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/demand-dignity>

Background information:

Nigeria: 'Just move them': Forced evictions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria (Report):
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR44/017/2010/en>

Chad: 10,000 at imminent risk of forced eviction (Urgent Action):
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR20/011/2010/en>

Kenya: Insecurity and indignity: Women's experiences in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya (Report):
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR32/002/2010/en>