

URGENT ACTION

COMMUNITY EVICTED WITHOUT WARNING

A community of some 250 people in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, have been left without shelter after police forcibly evicted them and set fire to their homes, without any prior notice. The community are now living out in the open, in many cases having also lost their possessions. The government has not offered the community food, water or shelter.

According to those forcibly evicted, at about 12.30am on 25 August, police raided and destroyed an informal settlement at Borrowdale Race Course in Harare's suburb of Gunhill. At least 30 uniformed police officers were present, some of whom were armed or had dogs. There was no prior notice or consultation with the community. They were given 10 minutes to remove their possessions from the structures where they lived, before police officers began setting fire to their homes. Some people did not have time to retrieve their possessions. Some of the group were then forced to remain in a police vehicle until the early hours of the morning when they were taken to Harare Central Police Station. Fifty five community members, including five children, were detained for several hours without charge, and without access to lawyers.

Police gave no indication to community members or their lawyers of the reason why the eviction was carried out. It remains unclear who instigated it. Without alternative shelter, victims returned to the site of the settlement at Gunhill and are now living in the open. Many have lost both their homes and their possessions.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

To the Mayor of Harare:

- Urging him to take immediate action to ensure the members of the community forcibly evicted from an informal settlement at Borrowdale Racecourse have emergency access to food, water and shelter;
- Calling on him to ensure the community receive adequate reparation, including adequate alternative housing and compensation;
- Expressing concern that the forced eviction has taken place following the Mayor's commitment in December 2009 to provide alternative shelter to this community before any evictions were carried out and asking him to call for an investigation.

To the Commissioner-General of Police:

- Call on him to halt any further forced evictions by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP);
- Reminding him that forced evictions are a violation of international law and should only take place when there has been opportunity for genuine consultation with those affected and when appropriate procedural protections are in place;
- Urging him to launch an independent and impartial investigation into the forced eviction and burning of homes at Borrowdale Racecourse on 25 August.
- Urging him to ensure that all officers under his command are aware of international guidelines on the use of force.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

Mayor of Harare
 Cllr Muchadeyi Masunda
 1st Floor Town House
 P. O. Box 990, Harare, Zimbabwe
Fax: +263 4 751124
Salutation: Dear Mayor

Augustine Chihuri
 Commissioner-General of Police
 Zimbabwe Republic Police General Head Quarters
 PO Box 8807, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
Fax: + 263 4 253 212
Salutation: Dear Commissioner-General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In July 2009 the same community came under threat when the Deputy Mayor of the Harare City Council stated that the city authorities were considering evicting people from “illegal settlements and market places to restore order.” The Deputy Mayor claimed that the targeted people were posing a health hazard and violating city by-laws.

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action as a result of this threat (see UA 196/09, AFR 46/021/2009: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/021/2009/en> and follow-up). The Mayor of Harare then met with Amnesty International representatives, and a coalition of stakeholders including the Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA), whose Chair acted as a spokesperson for the coalition; the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR).

In December 2009 the Mayor of Harare sent a letter to Amnesty International, in which he acknowledged receiving petitions and letters from Amnesty International members and supporters. In his letter, the Mayor stated that "due to the concerns expressed by some stakeholders, the intended exercise is being revisited ...In the case of informal settlements, no effort will be spared in looking for alternative shelter for those affected before they are removed. Every effort will be undertaken to undertake the whole effort as humanely as possible."

The office of the Mayor of Harare has denied that the City of Harare was responsible for the recent forced eviction.

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