

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index AI: AMR 36/004/2014
17 January 2014

Haiti: How long will impunity continue for attacks against people displaced by the 2010 earthquake?

A thorough and impartial investigation must be immediately initiated into the causes of the 11 January fire which tore through the displacement camp known as “Comité du peuple progressiste” in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, Amnesty International has said.

Four people died in the fire, including three young children, whilst around thirty others were hospitalized with burns. All of the makeshift shelters of the 108 families who lived in the camp were completely destroyed by the flames, along with their personal belongings.

According to some of the residents, the fire may have been arson. They have stated that a few days before the incident, the individual laying claim to the land came to the camp accompanied by armed men and police officers and threatened residents that the camp would be destroyed if they did not leave.

A few weeks before the incident, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) carried out a census of the families, with the aim of including them in a relocation programme.

A representative from the Haitian Civil Protection Agency who was interviewed at the scene of the incident by a local radio said that the authorities would open an investigation into the fire.

“The Haitian authorities have the obligation to investigate this terrible incident and to bring those responsible to justice, should the suspicion of arson be confirmed. Such a serious act cannot be allowed to go unpunished” said Chiara Liguori, Amnesty International’s researcher for the Caribbean.

In the past, a number of families have been the victim of similar fires in different IDP camps in the Haitian capital, whose origin was suspected to be arson. In some cases, the sites were completely cleared out following fires and residents found themselves homeless once again and left without any type of assistance from the authorities.

“However, no one has been brought to trial, victims have not received any compensation, and there is no evidence that investigations have actually been carried out by the Haitian authorities”, said Chiara Liguori.

For example, during the night of Saturday 16 February 2013, residents of ACRA 2 camp in Pétion Ville saw armed men set fire to their camp. The following day, a second fire destroyed the remaining shelters and forced the residents – several hundred families – to abandon the site. According to reports from residents and Haitian human rights organizations, a child died in the fire.

Although concerns expressed by different national and international human rights organizations have led certain authorities to promise that there would be an investigation into the fire and the forced eviction which followed, Amnesty International has as yet not received any confirmation that such an investigation has actually been carried out.

“It is high time that the Haitian authorities turn their promises into action. If the fire and forced eviction in Acra 2 camp had not gone unpunished, the incident in “Comité du peuple progressiste” camp might never have happened, and lives may have been saved” added Ms. Liguori.

Overcrowding in the camps, where shelters are often less than a foot apart, facilitates the spreading of fires.

“This fire happened on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the earthquake. After four years, displaced families should not still have to live in these appalling conditions, where a tragedy like the one which occurred in “Comité du peuple progressiste” camp becomes an ever present danger.

“Displaced people living in camps have suffered too much injustice. The authorities must absolutely provide them with the protection they are entitled to and facilitate their access to justice for the human rights violations they have suffered.”