

AI Index: PRE 01/277/2009
17 July 2009

Amnesty International Condemns Forced Eviction of Cambodian Families

The forced eviction of 60 low-income families in central Phnom Penh on Thursday and Friday has been strongly condemned by Amnesty International.

The families dismantled their homes after three years of government harassment and intimidation, with no choice but to accept inadequate compensation rather than have their homes demolished.

“Amnesty International strongly condemns this forced eviction and the deeply flawed process that led to it,” said Brittis Edman, Amnesty International’s Cambodia researcher.

Before dawn on Friday, at least 70 security forces, some armed with guns and electronic batons, moved in and blocked off the area known as Group 78 where four remaining families were holding out, with human rights workers and journalists monitoring the situation. Dozens of hired workers demolished what was left of the dismantled houses. Within hours, the resisting families had agreed to leave.

The families in Group 78 had been living under the threat of forced evictions for three years, with the Cambodian authorities following none of the safeguards required under international law.

“Group 78 was clearly cut off from due process and denied justice. The Municipality of Phnom Penh made no attempts to properly consult with the affected community or explore any feasible alternative to eviction,” said Brittis Edman. “This makes a mockery of the government’s obligations to protect the right to housing.”

The Municipality issued a final eviction notice to Group 78 in April 2009 and, in a series of subsequent meetings, officials, including Phnom Penh's deputy governor, warned the community that the police and military police would demolish their homes if they did not accept the compensation on offer. The community had also received information that up to 700 security forces had been mobilised for the eviction.

Group 78 residents started moving into the area on the riverfront in 1983 and have applied for formal land titles several times since 2006, but the authorities have ignored their applications in spite of official documentation proving strong ownership claims. The final eviction order was issued by the Municipality, which has no mandate under national law to issue such a document, and without the judicial overview required under the 2001 Land Law. It was issued despite the fact that a local Commission has yet to determine who owns the disputed land. The options for alternative accommodation and compensation offered by the Municipality were inadequate.

The Cambodian Government has consistently failed to guarantee the right to adequate housing and protect its population against forced evictions. In 2008 alone, Amnesty International received reports about 27 forced

evictions, affecting an estimated 23,000 people. Amnesty International is repeating its calls on the government to end forced evictions and introduce a moratorium on all mass evictions until the legal framework protects human rights.

As part of its Demand Dignity campaign, launched in May 2009, Amnesty International is calling on the Cambodian Government to end forced evictions and introduce a moratorium on all mass evictions until the legal framework protects human rights.

Through this campaign, the organisation is calling on governments globally to take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies that comply with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions.

Notes to editors

Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, big corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit <http://demanddignity.amnesty.org/campaigns-en/> Forced evictions are evictions which are carried out without adequate procedural and legal safeguards, such as adequate notice, prior consultation with those affected, provision of legal remedies and adequate alternative accommodation. Under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR), Cambodia is prohibited from carrying out forced evictions, and must protect people from forced evictions.