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Without human rights, sustainable urban development is not achievable

Amnesty International today called on governments in Africa to realize the internationally recognized right to adequate housing, prior to the Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), which will be held from 11 to 15 April under the theme of *Sustainable Urban Development through Expanding Equitable Access to Land, Housing, Basic Services and Infrastructure*.

Forced evictions are endemic in Africa and every year leave hundreds of thousands of people homeless and vulnerable to a host of other human rights abuses. Many people living in slums and informal settlements are denied access to essential services such as sanitation, clean water, primary education, and health care. State-provided security is almost non-existent, and women and children are all too frequently exposed to abuses. In many countries the authorities ignore the plight of people living in slums and informal settlements and exclude them from national plans and budgets.

These failures constitute a violation of the right to adequate housing, the rights to, water, sanitation, education and health and the right to equal protection of the law, among others.

Governments in Africa must end forced evictions, ensure equal access to public services and promote the active participation of people living in informal settlements and slums in decisions and processes that impact their lives.

In Kenya, there is a high risk of fires in homes in Nairobi's slums and informal settlements because of the poor quality of the materials used and the poor construction of the homes themselves. Overcrowded conditions and haphazard electricity connections also increase the risk of fires. The lack of proper roads limits access by fire services and the lack of access to water leads to fires spreading between houses and other structures extremely quickly.

In a fire on 8 March 2011 in the Deep Sea informal settlement in the Westlands area of Nairobi, around 80-90% of the housing structures were destroyed. Up to 10,000 people were affected according to the Red Cross – a majority were made homeless and dozens were reportedly injured. In recent weeks fires were reported to have broken out in other slums and informal settlements including in Kibera, the largest slum in Nairobi.

The large numbers made homeless as a result of the Deep Sea fire, starkly illustrates the need for the Kenyan government to address the inadequate housing conditions in informal settlements in Nairobi to ensure that all persons are able to enjoy the right to live somewhere in security and dignity.

In Zimbabwe, the lives of pregnant women and their babies in Hopley settlement, on the outskirts of Harare, are in danger because of the government's failure to ensure access to adequate housing and essential services including health care. There is currently no maternal and newborn health care available within the community. The majority of Hopley's 5,000 residents are survivors of the government's 2005 programme of mass forced evictions known as Operation Murambatsvina. The UN estimates that 700,000 people lost their homes, their livelihoods, or both during Operation Murambatsvina.

Most residents at Hopley were settled there under the government's rehousing programme, known as Operation Garikai, after their homes were destroyed during Operation Murambatsvina. As a remedy for the mass forced evictions, Operation Garikai was from the outset a wholly inadequate response. A few 'lucky' victims were allocated unfinished houses while thousands more were offered bare plots of unserviced land. The vast majority of survivors have received no assistance and were left to fend for themselves.

Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwean government to immediately put in place all necessary measures to ensure pregnant women and girls at Hopley settlement, and other Operation Garikai settlements, have access to maternal and newborn care.

In Ghana, thousands of railway dwellers in Accra are facing eviction to make way for the redevelopment of the railway system. Many of those facing eviction have nowhere else to go and will be left homeless if the evictions go ahead.

The railway plans have been developed without consulting the railway dwellers on how they will be affected and there are no plans for resettlement or compensation.

The plans place thousands of people at risk of being forcibly evicted from their homes and making them vulnerable to other human rights violations. Their eviction will only deepen their poverty.

Although Amnesty International appreciates the authorities' intention to redevelop the railway system and the benefits it will accrue to the people of Ghana, the government of Ghana must ensure that any development programme is carried out in a manner that protects the rights of all people who may be affected.

In Chad tens of thousands of people have been forcibly evicted from their homes since February 2008 without due process, adequate notice, consultation, alternative housing or compensation. A few victims went to court and won cases against the government but few court decisions were enforced.

The Chadian government must stop evictions from informal settlements in N'Djamena until safeguards are put in place to ensure that all evictions comply with international human rights standards.

Amnesty International calls on all governments in Africa to promote sustainable urban development by respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate housing and other human rights of people living in informal settlements and slums. In particular, Amnesty International calls on 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 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.

Further information:

Kenyan Government Urged to Protect Slum-Dwellers after Fire
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR32/002/2011/en>

Zimbabwe: 'They swallow the wind and die': Newborn deaths in Hopley settlement, Zimbabwe
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/014/2010/en>

Ghana: Authorities must stop the forced eviction of families living along Accra's railway lines
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR28/002/2011/en>

Chad: No Homes, No Justice, No Dignity: Victims of forced evictions in Chad
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR20/004/2011/en>