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MEDIA BRIEFING

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'People Live Here': The Bigger Picture

Across Africa, informal settlement residents and people facing forced evictions are calling on their governments and local authorities to end forced evictions and respect housing rights.

N'Djamena, CHAD

CONTEXT:

Since 2008 tens of thousands of people have been made homeless after being forcibly evicted from their homes in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. Houses and other structures have been demolished by security forces and in most cases no warning was given and residents had to scramble to try and save their belongings.

In January this year the homes of more than 670 people, as well as the community school in the Sabangali area of the capital, were reduced to rubble. No compensation or alternative housing has been granted yet to those who lost their homes, and many were initially living under trees.

"We don't really know what to do with all this. Only God will help," one evicted woman told Amnesty International.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE

On March 17 hundreds of victims of forced evictions in N'Djamena gathered in the Don Bosco Centre to view a photo exhibition documenting forced evictions and to watch a slums film projection. The event was followed by a debate with guest speakers from the affected communities, partner organizations and Amnesty International.

Accra, GHANA

CONTEXT

Tens of thousands of people living in informal settlements are at risk of forced evictions in Ghana. Ghana's laws do not provide adequate protection against forced eviction and the authorities have failed to put in place adequate safeguards to prevent people being forcibly evicted in violation of their human rights.

Thousands of people living and working next to railway lines are to be evicted to make way for the redevelopment of the railway system. Known as the railway dwellers, the men, women and children who live and trade in kiosks and small structures built along the railway lines face homelessness and destitution if they are evicted from their homes.

In Old Fadama, Ghana's biggest slum, between 55,000 and 79,000 people live without security of tenure and under the constant threat of forced eviction.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE:

On Wednesday 21 March 1,000 slum residents will parade through central Accra with a brass band, and gather in a rally to make their demands heard. There will also be a photo exhibition and drama performance on forced evictions.

Nairobi, KENYA

CONTEXT

Up to 2 million people live in informal settlements and slums in Nairobi, in inadequate housing with little access to clean water, sanitation, health care, schools and other essential public services.

Women and girls are particularly affected by the lack of adequate access to sanitation facilities for toilets and bathing. Inadequate and inaccessible toilets and bathrooms, as well as lack of street lighting, the general lack of effective policing and insecurity, make women more vulnerable to rape and other forms of gender based violence. Violence against women is endemic in Nairobi's slums and settlements, goes widely unpunished and significantly contributes to making and keeping women poor.

Forced evictions are common in Nairobi despite explicit recognition of the right to adequate housing under Article 43(1) of the Constitution. In recent court cases the High Court has interpreted this right to include a prohibition on forced evictions and the right of affected people to an effective remedy. Forced evictions continue to take place in spite of court injunctions and a longstanding commitment by the government of Kenya to adopt legal guidelines on evictions, which would regulate the eviction process and prohibit the practice of forced evictions.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE:

On Thursday 22 March 54 slum residents, each symbolically representing a country in the African Union, will participate in a shadow conference, mirroring the official African housing ministers meeting (AMCHUD, Tues 20 – Fri 23 March) taking place in their city. Reading out messages and demands from slum communities in Chad, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the residents will present their reality of mass forced evictions and housing rights violations taking place across the continent. Slum residents from Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe will fly in to attend the conference and exchange ideas.

On Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 March a roadshow truck with a PA system, music, entertainers and local celebrities will travel to four Nairobi slums Korogocho, Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru Kwa Njenga.

Port Harcourt, NIGERIA

CONTEXT

Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State is located in Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta. The waterfront settlements are built on reclaimed land along the city's shoreline. In July 2008 the governor of Rivers State announced that all waterfronts would be demolished as part of a programme of 'urban renewal'. The program has been developed without any consultation with the affected communities and without their participation. Although mass evictions are planned under the renewal programme, the authorities have not developed a resettlement plan to provide the hundreds of thousands of people who will be evicted with alternative accommodation.

When Njemanze informal settlement was demolished in August 2009 up to 19,000 people lost their homes; women, children and the elderly were left homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations. If the authorities continue with the planned demolitions of all remaining

waterfront settlements without first implementing adequate human rights safeguards, more than 20,000 people will be at risk of losing their homes and livelihoods.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE:

On 22 March there will be a public forum where residents of informal settlements will give testimony of their experience of threats of evictions and consequences of demolitions, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission. There will be a cinema screening of forced evictions and slum films.

Cairo, EGYPT

CONTEXT:

About 12 million people live in informal settlements in Egypt with nearly half of them in Greater Cairo, according to official sources. Informal settlements have been growing over the last 50 years because of the acute shortage of affordable housing. Slum-dwellers generally suffer from overcrowding and lack of basic services such as sewerage and clean water.

Since a deadly rockslide in 2008 where at least 119 people died in Manshiyet Nasser informal settlement in Cairo, the authorities have given priority to relocate residents of “unsafe areas”. This has led to waves of forced evictions in Cairo and other cities. Even in the years following the designation of the “unsafe areas”, the authorities failed to genuinely consult with residents including about alternatives to eviction and relocation sites. Residents are not notified of their eviction and had no chance to challenge it in court. Hundreds of people ended up homeless as a result. Those relocated were generally re-housed in remote areas far from their sources of income. In some instances life threatening areas were neglected while evictions were carried out in other places.

Slum-dwellers are also threatened by the Cairo 2050 master plan which envisages their relocation to the outskirts of the city, although the plan seems to have been on hold since the 2011 uprising, in which slum dwellers participated in large numbers.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE:

On Thursday 22 March, in Giza, children’s art troupes from several informal settlements will present theatre, dancing, singing and poetry performances at Al-Samer Theatre in Al-Mohandessin in front of officials, slum-dwellers, community based organizations and civil society activists. Amnesty International will also distribute promotional items such as T-shirts and posters on housing rights. It will also invite the audience to sign a petition to stop forced evictions in Africa.

Harare, ZIMBABWE

CONTEXT:

In 2005 Zimbabwe carried out a programme of mass forced evictions known as Operation Murambatsvina, which targeted informal business and markets and left some 700,000 people homeless. The government created settlements to re-house some of the victims of the forced evictions but they lack services such as health care, schools, roads and others. Amnesty International has documented high levels of newborn deaths in one of the settlements because pregnant women and girls are unable to access maternal healthcare.

Last year Amnesty International found that more than 2,000 children in two of the settlements in Harare were being denied their right to education. They were attending unregistered schools that had no trained teachers, books and often in the open.

Nearly seven years later the government of Zimbabwe has failed to address the issue of destroyed livelihoods during Operation Murambatsvina. The evictions drove most of the affected people deeper into poverty as they were left to pick up the pieces on their own with no support from government. As a result most cannot afford to pay for access to services, to renew their lease agreements and have been left dependent on food aid or support from friends and family.

PEOPLE LIVE HERE:

On Friday 23 March in Harare, two hundred slum residents will march through the city to Harare Gardens where there will be an arts festival. Theatre groups will perform specially-written plays about forced evictions and the slum community's demands for housing rights. The Minister of National Housing and Social Amenities and city government authorities will be invited.