

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA BRIEFING

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## **Africities Summit 2012 – 4-8 December**

Africities 2012- is an international summit taking place in Dakar, Senegal, where delegates, including local government officials, city mayors, property developers and private companies from around the world, will discuss urban development in African cities.

Amnesty International is attending the summit to remind delegates of their obligations under international human rights law and to call upon them to end forced evictions and respect the right to adequate housing.

### **African cities and forced evictions**

According to UN Habitat, around three out of every four people living in an African city south of the Sahara live in an informal settlement or “slum”. The reason for this vast number of city dwellers living in slums is that governments in Africa have failed to plan for affordable places to live in the city.

Every year in African cities thousands of families are removed from their homes or land they occupy without legal protections and other safeguards. People living in informal settlements, or slums, often lack security of tenure placing them at even higher risk of forced eviction. The evictions are often carried out without genuine consultation, adequate and reasonable notice and often leave people homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations.

Governments in Africa may be developing the city, but they are forgetting many of the people who live in it. Even if infrastructure development needs to take place, forced evictions are illegal and can never be the answer. By leaving people homeless, without their possessions or jobs, and their children driven out of school, forced evictions leave many destitute and deeper in poverty.

Forced evictions violate a range of international and regional human rights obligations, in particular the right to adequate housing. African governments are obliged to guarantee adequate housing and to refrain from and prevent forced evictions.

### **Amnesty International and Forced Evictions**

Over the years Amnesty International has documented cases of forced evictions in Angola, Chad, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. See below for case studies from Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria.

### **Port Harcourt, NIGERIA**

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 the Great Port Harcourt Master Plan to develop the city. This urban renewal program has been developed without any consultation or participation of the affected communities.

Between 27 June and 2 July 2012 thousands of people were forcibly evicted from their homes in Abonnema Wharf waterfront when the Rivers State government demolished the entire community. Most Abonnema Wharf residents were not offered any compensation, alternative housing or even emergency shelter to mitigate the impacts of the demolition. Many people were forced to sleep outside on the street or in cars, or shelter in nearby churches when their homes were destroyed with little or no notice in many situations. Furthermore, the demolitions were carried out in pouring rain during the rainy season, when it was extremely difficult to move around to find shelter.

Community activist Jim George lived in a three bedroom apartment in Abonnema Wharf with his wife and five children. Bulldozers destroyed their home and all their belongings. "Whether demolition is the government's style of development, we do not understand. This type of development is something that leads to permanent suffering," he explained.

*Amnesty International has spokespeople (based in London) who can talk about this case and can facilitate visits to the waterfront settlements and an interview with Jim George or other people affected by forced evictions.*

### **Accra, GHANA**

Tens of thousands of people living in informal settlements are at risk of forced evictions in Accra. 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.

"Amnesty International understands the need and desire for development in Ghana. However, development should never come at the cost of human rights," said Lawrence Amesu, Director of Amnesty International Ghana.

In Old Fadama, Ghana's biggest slum in the capital Accra, between 55,000 and 79,000 people live without security of tenure and under the constant threat of forced eviction. The slum is on the edge of Korle Lagoon, where the government is carrying out an ecological restoration project. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly evicted residents in January 2012 and is attempting to evict more. Those who were evicted claim that they were not adequately consulted or given a notice period.

There have also been several fires in the slum this year, the most recent on 28 November 2012 which claimed three lives. Slum resident Abdallah Ibn Alhassan who helped the residents recover from the fire said that it was caused by a candle, which a family was using to light their home because of a power blackout.

*Abdallah Ibn Alhassan will be speaking about forced evictions in Ghana at the Summit in Dakar. Amnesty International can also facilitate visits to slums in Accra.*

### **Nairobi, Kenya**

Life is precarious for the approximately 2 million people who live in Nairobi's informal settlements and slums. They make up over half the capital's population yet are crammed into only 5 per cent of the city's residential area and just 1 per cent of all land in the city. They are forced to live in inadequate housing and have little access to clean water, sanitation, healthcare, schools and other essential public services. They also live under the constant threat of forced eviction from the makeshift structures they have made their homes.

Thousands of residents of Deep Sea informal settlement in Nairobi's north-west Westlands Division could be at risk of forced evictions if the Kenyan authorities fail to put in place legal safeguards in line with international human rights standards and Kenya's domestic legal

obligations during the planning and implementation of the 'Eastern Missing Links' road construction project.

The Constitution of Kenya affirms the right to adequate housing, which the High Court has interpreted on three separate occasions to include the right not to be forcibly evicted from one's home. In addition, Kenya is a party to several international human rights treaties which require a guarantee of adequate housing for all. These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Deep Sea residents and Amnesty International are closely monitoring developments to ensure that the project does not result in forced evictions and that the human rights of people who would be affected by the project are adequately protected.

*Amnesty International has spokespeople (based in London) who can talk about this case and we can facilitate visits to Deep Sea in Kenya.*

**For photographs of slums and slum residents in Port Harcourt and Nairobi, see this link <http://tinyurl.com/bwz9ab2>**

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