

Ghana: Authorities must stop the forced eviction of families living along Accra's railway lines

Date: 7 February 2011

We the undersigned organisations call on the Government of Ghana to stop the forced eviction of people living in informal settlements along Accra's railways.

On 21 January 2011 the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) announced it would demolish structures built next to railway lines in Accra, in order for construction work on the lines, planned as part of a nationwide revamping of the railway infrastructure, to begin in February.

These structures are home to thousands of poor people, including widows, children, the old and infirm. Their eviction, without the provision of adequate alternative accommodation and compensation, will only deepen their poverty.

The government has not carried out an enumeration of the affected people living in houses along the railway line. Enumeration would enable the authorities to collect detailed information about individuals considered for eviction and their circumstances. Without an enumeration exercise the government has no way of knowing who they are evicting, whether young children, an ill or disabled person, or an old person lives in a structure. An eviction that is blind to the circumstances of residents and that does not provide for the welfare and wellbeing of people cannot be justified.

In addition to protecting people from forced evictions, international law requires every government to ensure that people have access to adequate housing. This means the government of Ghana, must not, through their actions, policies and practices, render people homeless and destitute.

The wholesale destruction of homes without safeguarding the human rights of those affected is reprehensible.

The government of Ghana must ensure that its developmental aspirations are taken forward in a way where people, who are already living in poverty, are not left out of the process and forced deeper into poverty. Any development programme should be carried out in a manner that protects the rights of people who may be affected.

Although we appreciate the authorities' intention to redevelop the railway system and the benefits it will accrue to the people of Ghana, this must be done in a manner which respects human rights and should not leave people homeless.

Under international human rights law and standards it is clear that even in situations under which an eviction may be considered justified, it should be carried out in strict compliance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law and in accordance with general principles of reasonableness and proportionality.

The authorities must also ensure that they put in place a mechanism that ensures that the railway dwellers can challenge administrative decisions relating to their presence along the railway as well as measures relating to their relocation.

The AMA has failed to put safeguards in place, which are required under international law before any evictions are undertaken and to develop plans to provide adequate alternative housing to those residents who face homelessness and destitution if evicted.

We urge the Government of Ghana to suspend the eviction people from their homes until the mandatory legal protections and safeguards are in place and an enumeration of affected communities has been completed; and to seek durable solutions to ensure the right to

adequate housing of all people living along the railway is respected. This includes the right not to be subjected to a forced eviction.

Background

On 21 January 2011, officials from the Accra Metropolitan Authority Railway Development Authority visited communities along Accra's railway lines. They issued fresh eviction notices to those people living within 160 metres of the tracks. The eviction notices did not tell people the date that they would be evicted. However, the Chief Executive of AMA stated that the AMA would ensure that homes and businesses were demolished in order for construction work to begin in February. On 25 January, buildings were painted with the words "Remove by January 25 2011 by AMA". Threats were allegedly made on 31 January 2011 to evict people from their homes at night.

Under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Ghana is a State Party, the government is prohibited from carrying out forced evictions, and must protect people from forced evictions.

Signed:

Amnesty International

Combined Harare Residents Association of Zimbabwe

CMAP

GHAUFUP

Habitat International Coalition

Housing Rights and Eviction Hatcliffe

International Alliance of Inhabitants

Ngazi Ya Chini

Wanawake Mashinani Initiative of Bunge La Mwananthi Women's Social Movement

Women in Slums Economic Empowerment (WISEEP)

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