

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Fire shows need for protection for slum-dwellers

Amnesty International today called on the Kenyan authorities to open an immediate investigation into the causes of an explosion and fire at an informal settlement in Nairobi, and to provide assistance and support to those affected.

More than 100 people are reported to have died after a petrol pipeline exploded and started a fire in an informal settlement located next to the pipe. The informal settlement, known as Sinai, is located in the industrial area of Nairobi. The fire is believed to have caused extensive damage in Sinai.

The exact cause of the explosion remains unknown, although it is believed to be linked to a petrol leak spilling into an open sewer. A police spokesman said fuel had leaked from a tank in a nearby depot.

Fire can spread rapidly in Nairobi's slums and informal settlements. Settlements are often located in areas which make them vulnerable to fire, such as the industrial area with its petrol pipes and depots. The poor quality of construction of homes, the materials used and the overcrowded conditions in settlements can all increase the risk of fires.

This latest incident of fire starkly illustrates the particular vulnerability and inadequate conditions faced by people living in slums and informal settlements. Amnesty International urges the Government of Kenya to address the inadequate and often dangerous housing conditions in informal settlements in Nairobi to ensure that all persons are able to enjoy the right to live in security and dignity.

Amnesty International calls on the Kenyan government and the Nairobi city council to provide emergency relief to all those affected by the fire, including food, water. They should also provide shelter for those who have been left homeless by the fire, and help to increase fire safety by providing information to residents and improving access roads to ensure that emergency services are able to access such areas in the future.

Amnesty International also urges the Government of Kenya to ensure credible independent investigations into the causes of the incident and take action on the outcome of the investigation to ensure that such incidents do not take place in the future and put in place safeguards to prevent further leakages and accidents.

Since the incident, several officials including the Prime Minister are reported to have told people to move away from the area. Amnesty International recognises the dangers faced by residents of Sinai in living next to the pipeline. Where the Kenyan authorities consider that residents must be evacuated from the area, they should prioritise moving people based on an assessment of the risks they face. Such action should include the provision of temporary alternative housing where there is an imminent danger to lives.

Procedural safeguards must be put in place to ensure that such evacuations comply with international standards on evictions. While people may have to be moved swiftly for reasons of safety, this cannot be used to justify leaving people homeless, and the state must provide the necessary support if people need to be moved. If adequate consultation and all the required

procedural safeguards cannot be put in place before moving people, the authorities must meet these requirements as far as possible once people are moved away from danger, particularly in terms of compensation for their losses and consultation on resettlement, ensuring that all resettlement sites comply with the criteria for adequate housing.

Background

A number of Nairobi's slums and informal settlements were destroyed or otherwise affected by fires during March and April 2011. On 8 March, around 80-90% of the Deep Sea informal settlement in Westlands was destroyed after fire broke out. According to the Kenya Red Cross, up to 10,000 people may have been affected by the fire – a majority of them having been made homeless, and dozens were reportedly injured.

The work in Kenya forms part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign, which focuses on human rights violations that drive and deepen poverty. As part of the campaign, Amnesty International is calling on all governments to 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.