

# URGENT ACTION

## THOUSANDS AT RISK OF FORCED EVICTION

**Thousands of people are at risk of forced eviction in the Nigerian city of Port Harcourt. The security forces began demolishing their homes on 27 June: nearly 300 homes have been demolished and hundreds of people have been made homeless.**

An estimated 30,000 people will be forcibly evicted and their houses demolished by the Rivers State government if the present demolitions continue. The state Joint Task Force (JTF), made up of police and soldiers, is leading the demolition of Abonnema Wharf waterfront in Port Harcourt. The residents received no written or verbal notice and were offered no alternative housing. Compensation payments are being made, but many property owners have not received them. Tenants do not receive any compensation. Hundreds of people will be left homeless if the demolitions continue. According to the Rivers State government Commissioner of Urban Development, state governor Rotimi Amaechi ordered the JTF to demolish the houses "for security reasons".

The Rivers State government have not followed due process. They did not tell the community the reasons for the demolitions, but the Commissioner of Urban Development told Amnesty International that they were carried out "to protect residents". The authorities told Amnesty International that there had been shootouts between rival gangs operating in the area in June, and the demolitions were intended to prevent more gang fighting. The demolitions are taking place despite the government telling landlords and property owners in a meeting on 17 May that their houses would not be demolished until they had received full compensation and enough time to relocate.

However, on 27 June, hundreds of people were left homeless and according to eyewitnesses many were forced to sleep either on the streets, or with friends and relatives in the remaining buildings; the JTF carried out mass arrests of residents before and during the demolitions. Scores of them have already been released. Local NGOs in Port Harcourt believe the demolition will continue.

### **Please write immediately in English or your own language:**

- Urging the authorities to provide temporary housing immediately to the people of Port Harcourt whose homes have been destroyed and who are currently homeless as well as emergency relief, including access to food, shelter, water, sanitation and health care services;
- Calling on them to stop all forced evictions in Abonnema Wharf, and ensure that all those already evicted receive adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses and suffering;
- Urging them to ensure all necessary safeguards are in place to prevent further forced evictions, and ensure that any evictions comply with national law, as well as regional and international human rights standards;
- Calling on them to order a full and independent investigation, and review the role of the JTF in assisting the demolitions, ensuring that police and soldiers are not ordered to assist in illegal evictions.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 AUGUST 2012 TO:**

#### Governor of Rivers State

Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi  
Office of the Governor  
Government House  
Port Harcourt  
Rivers State  
Nigeria

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Federal Minister of Lands, Housing and

#### Urban Development

Ms Ama Pepple  
Mabushi  
Abuja, Nigeria

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

#### **And copies to:**

The Executive Secretary  
National Human Rights Commission  
Professor Bem Angwe  
National Secretariat  
No.19, Aguiyi Ironsi Street  
Maitama,  
P.M.B. 444, Garki  
Abuja, Nigeria

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

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**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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## HUNDREDS AT RISK OF FORCED EVICTION

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State, is in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. In July 2008, the state governor announced plans to demolish all waterfront settlements in the city as part of a programme of "urban renewal". The waterfront settlements, about 40 in all, are built on reclaimed land along the city's shoreline, and are home to an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 people.

Abonnema Wharf has an estimated population of over 30,000 people. It is close to oil companies' petroleum tank storage areas. It is also home to people forced to leave the neighbouring Njemanze community, which was demolished in 2009. Many of the residents work for government institutions and agencies. However, the state governor told a press conference in Port Harcourt on 28 October 2011 that 80% of the population of waterfront communities such as Abonnema Wharf were criminals. He has since threatened demolition several times. In November 2011, a Rivers State High Court issued an injunction against the Rivers State Government, ruling that they should not carry out demolitions and evictions in Abonnema Wharf. The state government started paying compensation in June to landlords in the community, but not tenants. They convened a meeting on 17 May to inform people of the compensation process and the planned demolition. They had held similar consultation sessions in October 2011 and March 2012.

The demolition of Abonnema Wharf is being led by security officers from the Joint Task Force (JTF), who are federal agents but also under the direct command of the state governor. It follows several nights of shootouts in the community between rival gangs and security forces. The authorities claimed that the gangs were unhappy with the government's demolition plans for the community and were threatening some property owners who had collected payments in compensation for their properties. The authorities told Amnesty International that the demolitions were intended to serve as a deterrent to future gang activities in the community and its surroundings.

The state governor has also repeatedly said that "the demolition exercise [will] sanitize and check criminal activities" in the city. Thousands of people have already been forcibly evicted from their homes, and over 200,000 more are at risk from the waterfront settlements.

Nigeria is obliged under a range of human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to refrain from and prevent forced evictions. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasized that evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once all feasible alternatives have been explored and only after appropriate procedural and legal safeguards are in place. These include genuine consultation with the people affected, adequate and reasonable notice, adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses, safeguards on how evictions are carried out, and access to legal remedies and procedures, including access to legal aid where necessary. Governments are required to ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to other human rights violations as a consequence of an eviction. These requirements apply to all evictions, regardless of the tenure status of residents.

Chapter 2 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, Section 16 (2) (d) directs the state to ensure that suitable, adequate shelter is provided for all citizens. However, as with other provisions on social and economic rights, this falls within the Constitution's "directive principles". As such, it is not justiciable and therefore remains unenforceable in Nigeria's courts.

Name: Thousands of people living in Port Harcourt  
Gender m/f: Both

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