

URGENT ACTION

THOUSANDS FORCIBLY EVICTED IN PORT HARCOURT

Thousands of people in Abonnema Wharf have been forcibly evicted from their homes and many are in urgent need of emergency housing and relief services after the Rivers State authorities demolished their homes in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

After five days of demolitions in Abonnema Wharf waterfront in Port Harcourt, thousands of people have been forcibly evicted and many left homeless by the demolitions of the Rivers State authorities in Nigeria. Many people are being forced to sleep outside on the street, in cars or shelter in nearby churches, and are vulnerable to further human rights violations. Many residents did not know their homes would be demolished until the bulldozers arrived. They were not given time to collect their belongings and many people lost everything. Initial statements by the Rivers State government (RSG) suggested only those buildings implicated in gang shootouts earlier in June would be demolished; consequently, many people living in other areas of the community did not think their houses would be effected and did not attempt to pack their belongings until it was too late. However, the demolitions continued until the entire community was razed. Residents were not offered any alternative housing or even emergency shelter. The demolitions were carried out during rainy season when the weather conditions are bad and it's difficult for people to move easily around to find shelter.

The exact number of people who were living in Abonnema Wharf is not known, as no survey has been carried out, but in 2009 it was estimated by UN Habitat (Evictions and Demolitions in Port Harcourt, Fact Finding Mission Report, March 2009) to be more than 30,000 people. It is reported that many people had left the community since 2009. According to one estimate, between 10,000 and 20,000 have been forcibly evicted. There are indications that the government is planning further demolitions in the waterfronts.

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, and to provide them with emergency relief, including access to food, shelter, water, sanitation and health care services;
- Urging them to ensure that all those already evicted from Abonnema Wharf receive adequate alternative housing and compensation for all losses and suffering;
- Urging them to adopt a moratorium on all evictions and demolitions in the waterfronts as well as putting all necessary safeguards in place to prevent further forced evictions, and to 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 Joint Task Force (JTF) in assisting the demolitions, ensuring that police and soldiers are not ordered to assist in illegal evictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 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

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 184/12. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR44/032/2012/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State, is located in Nigeria's Niger Delta. In July 2008, the Governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi, 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. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 people live in the waterfronts.

Abonnema Wharf is one of over 40 waterfront communities in the city. It is situated close to petroleum tank farms belonging to different oil companies. It is also home to displaced people from neighbouring Njemanze community, which was demolished in 2009. Many of the residents are also workers of various government institutions and agencies. However, the Governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi has repeatedly claimed that many residents of the waterfront communities such as Abonnema Wharf are "criminals". As a result, the Governor has issued several threats about his planned demolition.

On Wednesday 27 June 2012, at approximately 7am, a bulldozer arrived at Abonnema Wharf waterfront and, under the supervision of heavily armed security forces (members of the Joint Task Force, Operation Polo Shield), began to demolish buildings in the community. Five days later, the entire community had been destroyed, with only a few buildings remaining.

According to the Rivers state government (RSG), the demolitions were carried out "for security reasons" following shooting in the community on Monday night. The community had been marked for demolition in May 2012 and the process of compensation of landlords was ongoing. Notice of demolition had not been given and residents did not know their homes would be demolished until the bulldozers arrived. They were not given time to collect their belongings and many people lost everything. The Commissioner for Urban Development told Amnesty International that it was unfortunate that they had not been able to complete the process before the demolitions were carried out.

In November 2011, a Rivers State High Court issued an injunction against the Rivers State authorities, ruling that they should not evict and demolish the homes, businesses, churches and schools of Abonnema Wharf Community residents in Port Harcourt .

The authorities announced in May 2012 that they would demolish Abonnema Wharf but said this would not be until landlords were compensated and residents given notice to relocate. However, the residents did not receive any written or verbal notice for this demolition and were not offered any alternative housing and many property owners are yet to receive payments in the incomplete compensation process. In June 2012, the government had started paying compensations to landlords in the community. Tenants have been entirely excluded and do not receive compensation. Prior to the payment of compensation, the government convened a meeting on 17 May 2012 to inform people of the compensation process and the planned demolition afterwards. This was in addition to other consultation sessions held in October 2011 and March 2012.

The Rivers State 2003 Physical Planning and Development Law No. 6 (Law No 6) provides safeguards for residents of buildings and structures in Rivers State and details what needs to be in place before a demolition can take place, such as adequate consultation process with affected residents, provision of adequate notice period to community residents and establishment of relevant bodies to oversee the process. However, the law has not been implemented. Under the 2003 Law, only when a structure is found to be "structurally defective, poses danger or constitutes a nuisance to the occupier and the public" is it specified that the Control department may issue a demolition notice. The Law No. 6, which provides for the "control, planning and development of land in the state", establishes specific bodies to oversee all matters affecting physical planning and development in the state, including planning approvals, the serving of enforcement notices, and the demolition of buildings and revocation of rights of occupancy. None of these bodies have been set up.

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

Further information on UA: 184/12 Index: AFR 44/035/2012 Issue Date: 3 July 2012