

Ref: Forced Evictions in Rio de Janeiro

Nawal El Moutawakel  
Chairperson  
Château de Vidy  
Case postale 356  
1001 Lausanne  
Switzerland

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**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT**  
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street  
London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom  
T: +44 (0)20 7413 5500 F: +44 (0)20 7956  
1157  
E: [amnestyis@amnesty.org](mailto:amnestyis@amnesty.org) W: [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

Dear Ms. Nawal El Moutawakel,

This is to bring to your attention a pressing matter that threatens to tarnish the mission, spirit and values of the XXXI Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

**Over the past 12 months, several low-income communities in Rio have been subjected to forced evictions conducted by municipal and state authorities under the pretext of the Olympics.**

The stories of the hundreds of families that have lost (or are at risk of losing) their homes have been documented by local and international human rights groups in communities like *Vila Taboinhas, Restinga, Vila Harmonia, Largo do Campinho, Rua Domingos Lopes, Favela do Sambódromo, Vila Quaxime/Madureira, Morro da Providência, Estradinha, Vila Recreio 2, Asa Branca, Pavão-Pavãozinho, Vila Autódromo, and Arroio Pavuna.*

Here are just three examples of what has unfolded:

1. On 22 October 2010, bulldozers arrived at the Restinga community and began demolishing homes and small shops that had operated in the area for more than 20 years. The community was not given any prior warning of the operation and, despite many judicial attempts to stop the eviction, homes and shops were destroyed before compensation was paid and without due process. One resident said:

*"At 10am there were machines, police officers, riot forces with large weapons and they started emptying out the houses. If someone refused to leave they would take the bulldozer and start breaking down the door. The officers would come into your house, take you out by force and then demolish it." [Edilson, resident]*

Until this day, many of the families that used to live and work in the Restinga community have lost their jobs and sources of income; some children were unable to transfer to new schools and ended up missing months of schooling.

*"Is this the Olympic spirit?" asked another resident – "there used to be 150 homes and small businesses here. We didn't get any kind of compensation, small businesses didn't get anything – not even one real." [Michel, resident]*

2. The same pattern of abuse unfolded in the nearby Vila Harmonia community, where residents endured months of pressure and harassment from city workers who – often without proper identification – threatened families by saying they would be kicked out without any compensation if they didn't accept resettlement in a remote area 60km away, far from schools, jobs and basic services. One resident described what happened on 16 December 2010:

*"They got here early, more than 20-30 municipal officers, police armed with machine guns, offers with riot weapons. They said: get out, put everything outside including the children because we're coming in. (...) They threatened us and said that if we didn't move, the machines would run us over. (...) We've lived here for 23 years."* [Antônia, resident]

3. More recently, on October 16 2011, Rio Municipal Housing Secretary Jorge Bittar visited the Vila Autódromo to formally notify the 1000 residents of the community that it will have to be removed to make way for Olympic Park infrastructure. When questioned about why the community must be resettled considering that the winning design for the space (created by architecture firm AECOM) includes the community, Bittar responded simply: "this is a commitment from the federal government to the International Olympic Committee."

It is not acceptable that the name of the IOC be used to carry out forced evictions. Thousands of families have already been arbitrarily removed from their homes in Rio and many more are living with the uncertainty of losing their homes in the months to come. Though Mayor Eduardo Paes and COB head Carlos Nuzman maintain that no evictions in Rio have been conducted by force and that all families are being appropriately compensated before losing their homes, this is far from accurate.

The situation became so severe that in April 2011, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, demanded urgent action from the Brazilian government in a formal letter issued after she received numerous complaints that indicated "a pattern of lack of transparency, consultation, dialogue, fair negotiation, and participation of the affected communities in processes concerning evictions undertaken or planned in connection with the World Cup and Olympics." Ms. Rolnik called on authorities at all levels (federal, state, municipal) to "put a stop to planned evictions until dialogue and negotiation can be ensured."

Forced evictions violate existing legislation at the municipal, state, and federal levels in Brazil. They also disregard international human rights standards and the very values enshrined in the Olympic Charter and Olympic Movement Agenda 21.

Under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR), Brazil is prohibited from carrying out forced evictions, and must protect people from forced evictions. These standards define forced evictions as those which are carried out without adequate procedural and legal safeguards, such as adequate notice, prior consultation with those affected, provision of legal remedies and adequate alternative accommodation. In the cases cited above, the authorities have clearly fallen well short of these principles, leaving communities vulnerable to pressure and harassment from officials, and often driving them further into poverty.

The severity of the evictions in Rio – and the human rights abuses associated with them – threaten the mission and spirit of the Olympic Games and must be immediately addressed by the IOC. We call on the IOC to use its influence to ensure the Olympic "force for good" is heard loud and clear in Rio by:

1. Publicly and unequivocally reaffirming its commitment to human rights by condemning any and all forced evictions carried out in the name of the Olympic Games and by calling on the Brazilian government to ensure that evictions are only carried out as a last resort, after all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored in genuine consultation with affected communities. All evictions must also comply with national and international human rights standards.
2. Requesting that the authorities in Rio de Janeiro substantiate their claims that all evictions are being done within the confines of the law by releasing to the Public Defenders' Office the names, compensation values, and resettlement locations of all of the families that have already been evicted due to Olympics-related construction projects. Call on the authorities to ensure that any resettlement that has been provided complies with international standards on adequacy of housing.
3. Asking the government to ensure that all persons who have been forcibly evicted are provided with effective remedies, including adequate alternative housing that maintains or improves their current standard of living.

4. Asking the government and city authorities to engage in genuine consultations with communities that are affected by construction of Olympics infrastructure or in other ways by the hosting of the games, in order to thoroughly assess, minimize and address any impacts on the human rights of these communities.
5. Asking the government and city authorities to live up to commitments made in their bid and, in conformity with the Olympics Charter and the Code of Ethics, ensure that the Olympics promote a positive legacy to the host city and country by increasing the availability of low-income housing and better living conditions for communities living in poverty.

We share the desire to ensure the best possible celebration and legacy for the XXXI Summer Olympic Games in 2016. But this story cannot be written with forced evictions. As a global symbol of cooperation and understanding, the Olympics must not be complicit with human rights abuses conducted in its name.

We look forward to hearing what steps the IOC plans on taking in order to better address this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International

Comitê Popular Rio Copa e Olimpíadas

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