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'Nowhere to Go': Forced Evictions in Haiti's Camps for Displaced People

Fanm Koperativ, Port-au-Prince

On 22 January 2013, police officers violently evicted 84 families from camp Fanm Koperativ, in the municipality of Port-au-Prince. According to information gathered by Amnesty International, families were not given any notice of the eviction and were forced out of their make-shift tents by the police accompanied by a group of men armed with machetes and hammers. A few days before the eviction, residents had organized a press conference to denounce the lack of response from the authorities regarding their situation. Residents believed that the eviction might have happened as a reprisal to that.

Suze Mondesir, a member of the camp committee, recounted their ordeal: "Around 10am a group of police officers accompanied by men armed with machetes and knives arrived at the camp. They insulted us and began to demolish our tents. The men pushed us around and the police waved their guns at us to prevent us from reacting."

Women have been particularly affected by the eviction as they have not only lost their homes and belongings but also their small business initiatives. Cléane Etienne, a resident from Camp Fanm Koperatif said: "They kicked over the pot of coffee which I was going to sell. That was my livelihood. Now I need money to start over." Another woman said: "Not only did we lose our belongings but we also had to buy wood and tarpaulins to rebuild our shelters, because we have nowhere else to go."

Sylvio Cator Stadium, Port-au-Prince

In early July 2011, the City Council of Port-au-Prince announced that on Friday 15 July it would evict over 500 families living in a makeshift camp located in the parking lot of Sylvio Cator Stadium in central Port-au-Prince. Many of these families were had been forcibly evicted before from the pitch in March 2010 by the authorities without a court order and without any information or alternatives being offered.

About 514 families rebuilt their shelters in the parking lot, around the stadium fascia. On Tuesday, 12 July 2011, the former mayor of Port-au-Prince went to the Sylvio Cator Stadium to inform them that they had to leave before Friday 15 July. This was the first notification of eviction. No written notice or judicial order as required in Haitian law was presented.

Under pressure from the camp residents, Haitian and international human rights organizations, the municipal authorities sought to find a relocation area. They identified a property less than 2km away, in the courtyard of an abandoned and partially demolished radio station. Only 40 families were able to build new make-shift shelters on the small walled property which was prone to flooding. No further assistance for relocation or rebuilding of shelters or facilities was provided. When Amnesty International visited the resettlement site in September 2011, it was evident that the new location was too small for the families living there.

Camp Mozayik, Delmas

On 4 May 2012, 126 families who lived in Camp Mozayik in Delmas municipality were forcibly evicted by local municipal officials accompanied by armed members from the Delmas' Streets Control Brigade (Brigade de Contrôle des Rues, BRICOR) and officers from the Haitian National Police.

The land where the internally displaced people built their make-shift shelters in the wake of the earthquake was set aside for a commercial development. The alleged owners did not initiate any legal proceedings to obtain an eviction order from the courts, as required under national law. They instead regained possession of the property through the involvement of the local municipal authorities and private individuals.

In early September 2011, representatives from the local municipal authorities visited Camp Mozayik and spray painted "to be demolished" on some makeshift shelters. Prior to this, camp residents had also received some verbal threats of the eviction. Months later, at around 4pm on 4 May 2012, without prior notice and without an eviction order, a demolition crew from Delmas municipality accompanied by armed agents from BRICOR started to destroy the makeshift shelters with hammers and machetes. The former mayor of Delmas himself supervised the operative. Shelters were torn down before many affected people could retrieve their belongings. Former Camp Mozayik residents told Amnesty International that anything which had not been broken or torn down during the demolition was stolen by gang members who accompanied the demolition crews and who had in the past issued the threats against the camp residents. The families did not receive any compensation or alternative accommodation. All 126 families were left homeless.

Place Jérémie, Carrefour Feuilles

On 21 December 2011, camp residents were woken up in the middle of the night by a group of around 10 men armed with knives, clubs and machetes, accompanied by a group of police officers that arrived in three police vehicles. The men tried handing over an envelope with some money in it to the residents and then they proceeded to destroy the shelters. Families were literally pushed out of their homes and did not have time to collect their belongings. Some camp residents, including children were still asleep when the tarpaulin shelters collapsed on them. Within four hours, all the families were left homeless and destitute.

Around 130 families (464 people) had built their make-shift shelters in Place Jérémie, a small square in the neighbourhood of Carrefour Feuilles. Since August 2011, camp residents had been subjected to threats, violence and intimidation from people living near the camp. Money was also offered to them to leave the square. However, they were not told why they were being evicted nor were they offered any alternative accommodation. The eviction was carried out without a judicial order and without any protection guarantees afforded to those affected. Some families that remained in the area of Place Jérémie following the forced eviction, continued to be threatened with arson.

Marie and her child were violently and forcibly evicted along with tens of other families from Place Jérémie on 21 December 2011. "Around 3 o'clock in the morning, they came and started knocking on the doors. Then they destroyed my shelter with razor blades and knives... They pushed me out and started tearing down everything. I did not have time to take any of my things with me; I left only with the clothes I was wearing. The day after, everything was cleared from the square with a machine." Another woman and former resident of Camp Jérémie shared a similar story with Amnesty International: "They came in with sticks and knives, they pushed me out with my baby and they started to tear down everything... I've lost everything, including my baby's clothes..."

Virgiela was also evicted from Place Jérémie. “They didn’t leave anything. When I returned to the camp, everything had been destroyed. I was at the hospital with my daughter who was sick... I couldn’t find anything, not even a single paper... like birth certificates, mine and those of my children... They took my money box with the little money I had saved. They took everything. After they destroyed the camp, I left for Jacmel with my daughter but she died 10 days later. I stayed there until March. When I returned to Port-au-Prince I went to my sister’s house... I’m living with my sister now but her husband doesn’t want me in the house so I have to sleep under the balcony, on the ground. I am not well at all.”