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Haiti: Hundreds of families left homeless in new wave of evictions

The Haitian authorities must urgently move to prevent illegal and violent evictions of people living in makeshift camps and take meaningful steps to provide them with appropriate housing, said Amnesty International today, after a new wave of evictions affected hundreds of families across Port-au-Prince.

Many of the 350,000 people still living in makeshift camps following the 2010 earthquake are also at risk.

On 22 January, 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 makeshift tents by the police accompanied by a group of men armed with machetes and hammers.

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."

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 believe that the expulsion might have happened as a reprisal to that.

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."

"Evicting people living in makeshift camps inflicts yet more trauma on people who have already lost everything in the earthquake. By not even allowing them time to gather their things and by leaving them out on the street, the authorities are denying earthquake victims their dignity" said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

Earlier in the month, on 12 January – the third anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake - municipal officials and officials from the Civil Protection Agency forcibly evicted around 600 families from Camp Place Sainte-Anne, also in the municipality of Port-au-Prince.

The camp's residents were informed of the eviction only five days in advance and were promised 20,000 gourdes (approximately US\$480) per family. However, according to the local organization Groupe

d'Appui aux Réfugiés et Repatriés, 250 families have yet to receive the money. On the day of the eviction, none of the families were given enough time to gather their belongings before their shelters were destroyed.

Carnise Delbrun, a member of the camp committee in Camp Place Sainte-Anne said: “We saw municipal officials firing in the air, throwing stones so we would leave, the police came later to back them up. Four people were hurt including a one year-old baby and a five year-old child who were injured by a plank of wood when the municipal officials were destroying their tent. Other residents were hit by stones and a lot of us lost money, mobile phones and other personal effects.”

“Forcing people out of camps must be avoided at all costs, and there must be genuine consultation and the provision of adequate alternative housing before any eviction takes place.” said Javier Zúñiga, “The Haitian authorities must prioritize the housing needs of those people still living in dire conditions in displacement camps three years after the earthquake,” he added.

On 12 January 2010, a devastating earthquake in Haiti left 200,000 dead and 2.3 million people homeless. Three years on, it is estimated that more than 350,000 people are currently living in 496 camps across the country.