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UN Millennium Development Goals: Human rights must not be marginalized in post-2015 agenda

World leaders risk deepening inequalities, discrimination and injustice if human rights remain side-lined in the post-2015 development agenda, Amnesty International warned ahead of crucial talks at the United Nations this week.

“The poorest, most disadvantaged and marginalised groups are being let down. Governmental drives to meet targets often ride rough-shod over basic human rights,” said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

The discussions in New York will review progress on the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] and set out a new 15 year plan to tackle poverty and sustainable development.

“Time is running out. People are being left behind. Governments need to stop paying lip service to human rights and make it central to the sustainable development agenda; otherwise targets are being achieved at the expense deepening inequalities, discrimination and injustice. There is a widening gap between rich and poor and between men and women and those from minority groups,” said Salil Shetty.

The MDGs and the post-2015 agenda must directly address the factors causing inequality. They must address and dismantle the multiple and systemic barriers which marginalize the most vulnerable sections of society.

More than a billion people living in slums are not even included in the MDG efforts because the MDG target on slums only commits to improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers.

Many states are carrying out mass forced evictions that drive slum dwellers even deeper into poverty whilst violating a whole range of their rights, including adequate housing, water, sanitation and health.

For example, according to United Nations Development Programme data, Nigeria has made progress on nearly all of the MDGs goals and there is a strong possibility it will meet many of the targets by 2015. Yet these top-line figures mask regional differences and inequalities and disparities between various groups and minorities.

In just one Nigerian city, more than 200,000 people face eviction because the authorities plan to demolish more than 40 informal settlements in Port Harcourt's waterfront area. Thousands will lose their livelihoods as well as their homes if the demolitions go ahead.

And it’s a similar story in many other countries. Amnesty International’s evidence shows, forced evictions are taking place across the world. In Europe, many cases are leading to the segregation of Roma communities. Across Africa, Asia and the Americas, tens of thousands have also been forcibly evicted from traditional lands to make way for multi-national extractive industries and agri-business.

“All too often multi-million dollar deals are struck with little regard to the rights of people who will be

most affected. They are forced from their lands and homes without genuine consultation, compensation or redress, including the provision of alternative accommodation. These economic deals are often heralded by states as helping them meet their MDGs; meanwhile the rights of the most marginalised and disadvantaged are simply ignored,” said Salil Shetty.

When development processes fail or result in human rights abuses and violations, governments, financial institutions, international donors and corporations must be held to account. The right to remedy is crucial.

“Where is the remedy for the millions of women who continue to suffer and, in many cases, die needlessly during pregnancy and childbirth because discrimination and a range of socio-economic barriers prevent them accessing sexual and reproductive health services? Maternal health is a human right.”

“Any development agenda agreed by world leaders cannot leave the poorest, most marginalised and excluded people behind. Unless world leaders commit to placing human rights at the heart of the development agenda, we cannot achieve real change. It is time for world leaders to deliver,” said Salil Shetty.