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Nigeria: Rivers State government set to demolish more homes

Amnesty International today warned hundreds of people – including many women and children – may be left homeless tomorrow morning if plans to demolish their homes to make way for a commercial development go ahead.

According to information received by Amnesty International, houses along the Njemanze Road in Port Harcourt are due to be demolished tomorrow morning.

Tenants of the houses were only given seven days notice to vacate their homes and businesses. Panic has now set into the community, with residents desperately trying to salvage what they can.

“Even our elderly fathers and children are on the street. We need help from the government,” said one local resident to Amnesty International.

“Many of the tenants have no where else to go and most are unable to afford the large deposit necessary to rent a new home,” said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

The buildings under threat stretch along approximately 2 kilometres of road, and will be demolished to give access to the site of the previously demolished Njemanze waterfront community.

The waterfront is one of the most densely populated areas of Port Harcourt. The state governor has repeatedly stated that demolitions along the waterfront are “to sanitize and check criminal activities.”

“Rivers State government is only permitted to carry out evictions as a last resort,” said Erwin van der Borgh.

“They are obliged, in every case, to explore all feasible alternatives to evictions and avoid or minimise the use of force.”

Amnesty International said that the Rivers State government is not following its own Physical Planning and Development Law (2003). Under this law, they should have established an “Urban Renewal Board”, which would have declared the waterfront communities an “improvement area”, for which it would have prepared an improvement plan. This law also requires the government to provide alternative housing for all the occupants affected. They have done none of this.

“The Governor of Rivers State should call an immediate halt to the planned demolitions, respect the rights of the residents to adequate and reasonable notice of any eviction, and ensure that all those effected receive adequate alternative housing and that no one is rendered homeless,” said Erwin van der Borgh.

Notes to editors:

- According to UN-HABITAT, evictions of inhabitants of Njamanze, Abonnema and surrounding areas, are to make way for a development called “Silverbird Showtime.” A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Rivers State Government and the company Silverbird Ltd agrees to ensure “peaceful evacuation and relocation of present occupants.”

- As part of its Demand Dignity campaign, launched in May 2009, Amnesty International is calling on governments globally to prohibit and prevent forced evictions and provide adequate housing for all of its residents.

- Amnesty International’s Demand Dignity campaign aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, big corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit <http://demanddignity.amnesty.org/campaigns-en/>