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Haiti: Three years on from earthquake housing situation catastrophic

Three years on from the Haiti earthquake the housing situation in the country is nothing short of catastrophic with hundreds of thousands of people still living in fragile shelters, Amnesty International said as it urged the authorities and the international community to make housing a priority.

The 12 January 2010 earthquake left more than 200,000 people dead and some 2.3 million homeless.

It is estimated that more than 350,000 people currently live in 496 camps across the country.

According to testimonies gathered by Amnesty International in Haiti, living conditions in the makeshift camps are worsening – with severe lack of access to water, sanitation and waste disposal – all of which have contributed to the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera.

Women and girls are vulnerable to sexual assault and rape.

“As if being exposed to insecurity, diseases and hurricanes were not enough, many people living in makeshift camps are also living under the constant fear of being forcibly evicted,” said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

Since the earthquake, tens of thousands of people have been forced from the camps. The International Organization for Migrations reported that nearly 80,000 more people living primarily in camps set up on private land are currently at risk of eviction – 21 per cent of the total camp population.

Marie (not her real name) and her child were violently and forcibly evicted along with tens of other families from Place Jérémie on 21 December 2011.

“The camp committee was putting pressure on us to leave the camp. They said they needed the square for a [football] championship. But we didn’t have anywhere to go so we stayed there. They distributed leaflets every now and then with threats. At night they would throw stones and bottles on our tents ... Then one day at 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.”

“Haiti suffered from a severe housing deficit even before the earthquake but for hundreds of thousands, the situation today is catastrophic,” said Javier Zúñiga.

Last April, the Haitian authorities made public a draft of a National Policy on Housing. The plan sets out a number of priorities for the construction of houses but does not set the conditions for those living in poverty to access adequate and affordable housing. The plan does also not commit to preventing forced evictions.

With the support of international donors, national authorities also launched, in August 2011, a plan to relocate people from 50 displacement camps to 16 neighbourhoods (“Project 16/6”). Through the project, families receive a rent subsidy of US\$500 over a period of 12 months to encourage them to leave the camps for better housing and US\$25 for transport. Families are responsible for finding their own home to rent and reaching an agreement with the landlord.

Even though the project helped some families, subsidies are too low, individuals are not supported to find accommodation and families are not offered support in the long-term.

Many people told Amnesty International delegates in Haiti of their worries about not knowing where they would live after the end of the subsidies, as they would not be able to afford the rent. As it is, they are currently struggling to feed themselves and their children, let alone pay for other basic essentials such as clothing, medicine and education.

“Current government housing initiatives seem to focus more on preventing people from living in public squares than providing them with safe homes. What we want to see is the implementation of policies that will actually make the right to adequate housing a reality in the country,” said Zúñiga.

The withdrawal of humanitarian actors in early 2011 and funding shortfalls have contributed to worsening living conditions in the makeshift camps. Only a fraction of funds pledged by donors has been allocated to fund housing projects.

“Back in 2010, the world couldn’t move fast enough to help Haiti but three years on, we see that the hopes for its recovery have not been realized, as the rights of Haitians do not seem to have been made a priority. The country needs action from national authorities and real support from the international community,” said Zúñiga.

HAITI EARTHQUAKE IN NUMBERS

The earthquake

200,000 people dead

2.3 million homeless

105,000 houses destroyed; 208,164 houses badly damaged

The Internally displaced

357,785 people (90,415 families) living in 496 camps (as of end October 2012)

52% are women

Forced evictions

60,978 individuals have been evicted from 152 camps since the earthquake

78,175 individuals are currently under threat of eviction – 21 % of the total number of IDPs currently living in camps

Living conditions in camps

72,038 internally-displaced people in 264 of the 541 camps did not have on-site access to water and toilets (in June 2012)

50% of camps remaining did not have on site access to water and toilets, affecting more than one internally displaced person out of six, for a total of 66,546 persons. (June 2012)

Before the earthquake

67% of the urban population lived in slums which were the areas most affected by the earthquake

The most unequal country in the Americas

56% of households live with less than a dollar a day and 77% with less than 2

The 10% of richest households in Haiti earned 68% of the total revenue of all households

Sources: *International Organization for Migration, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance and the United Nations Development Programme and Post-Disaster Needs Assessment for Haiti.*

[See Amnesty International's photos of displacement camps in Haiti](#)

See Amnesty International's video of Haiti's catastrophic housing situation

[Read more about Haitians living in displacement camps](#)