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Turkey urged to halt heavy handed evictions in Istanbul

The Turkish authorities should halt a series of heavy-handed forced evictions which have already resulted in a number of vulnerable families in central Istanbul effectively being made homeless, Amnesty International said today.

Dozens of families in the Tarlabaşı district are facing forced eviction as a result of an urban regeneration project. They told Amnesty International they have been subjected to intimidation and threats by the local Beyoğlu municipality and law enforcement officials. In some cases those officials forced them to sign eviction notices without being allowed to read them, or told them that failure to sign the documents would result in their immediate eviction.

Some residents have already been evicted. On 24 June, Besra, a single parent, returned from visiting her mother in hospital to find her door broken in. Officials forced her to vacate her home immediately, throwing her belongings out onto the street. Other families threatened with eviction include Roma, Kurds who settled in Tarlabaşı after being displaced from south-eastern Turkey in the 1990s, and transgender women, who already face considerable difficulty accessing housing.

"The municipal authorities in Beyoğlu must suspend the imminent forced evictions immediately, and not proceed with any eviction until safeguards consistent with international human rights standards are in place," said Andrew Gardner, Amnesty International's researcher on Turkey.

"Most of those facing eviction have not been given adequate notice. They have not been consulted, provided with legal remedies, or offered adequate alternative housing or compensation. This is a violation of their human rights. There must also be an investigation into the allegations of harassment by public officials," he added.

Amnesty International spoke to another Tarlabaşı resident, a disabled and unemployed 60 year-old man who said he had been forced to sign an eviction notice which he was not allowed to read. Although police postponed his eviction until 18 July after neighbours intervened, he has not been offered any affordable alternative housing.

While the authorities have made no formal approach to them, residents told Amnesty International that the only alternative housing which could be made available by the authorities was on the outskirts of Istanbul, more than two hours away by public transport. Many Tarlabaşı residents, who work for very low wages, would find these properties unaffordable, and the cost of commuting back to their jobs in central Istanbul prohibitive.

Amnesty International raised concerns about the forced evictions in a meeting with the Mayor of Beyoğlu, Ahmet Misbah Demircan, last month, pointing out they violated the municipality's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The mayor confirmed that no studies had been undertaken by the authorities to assess the impact of the regeneration project on at-risk groups such as transgender women.