

AI Index: PRE 01/298/2010
27 August 2010

Zimbabwe: Armed police torch homes of 250 people in Harare

Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwean government to take immediate action to protect some 250 people who were forcibly evicted before their homes and possessions were set alight during a night raid by armed Zimbabwean police.

According to those forcibly evicted, at around 00:30 on August 25 members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) raided an informal settlement in the Gunhill suburb of Harare. Some of the police were armed and accompanied by dogs. Residents received no notice of the eviction and were given just ten minutes to gather their possessions before being ordered into a police vehicle. Police gave no information as to why the eviction was being carried out or at whose instigation.

“Driving people forcefully from their homes in the middle of the night cannot be justified in any circumstance,” said Michelle Kagari, deputy Africa director at Amnesty International. “The brutality with which this forced eviction was carried out is alarming.”

Following the eviction 55 residents, including five children, were taken to Harare Central Police Station and detained without access to lawyers. Lawyers who attempted to attend their clients at the police station were not informed why they had been detained. All 55 detainees were released without charge later in the day.

Residents at the Gunhill settlement have previously been the victim of police raids in which members of the community are arbitrarily arrested, detained and subsequently released without charge in what appears to be a pattern harassment of by the police.

The community, estimated to be around 250 people, have since returned to the settlement at Gunhill and are living in the open without access to shelter.

“Amnesty International is calling on the Zimbabwean authorities to provide those made homeless with emergency shelter,” said Michelle Kagari. “They must also ensure that the victims receive adequate reparation, including adequate alternative accommodation and compensation.”

“The unity government must end the deplorable practice of forced evictions and give the Gunhill community assurances that this terrifying ordeal will not be repeated,” Michelle Kagari continued.

A large proportion of the Gunhill residents are former victims of Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order), a programme of mass forced evictions implemented by the Zimbabwean authorities in 2005 in which an estimated 700,000 people lost their homes. They had moved to the Gunhill settlement as a result of the 2005 eviction.

“The government has repeatedly failed to compensate or relocate the victims of Operation Murambatsvina. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to survive in deplorable conditions, and many face an ongoing threat of repeated forced eviction,” said Michelle Kagari.

Notes to Editor

- Forced evictions are evictions that are carried out without adequate notice or consultation with those affected, without legal safeguards and without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation. As a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights treaties which prohibit forced eviction and related human rights violations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Zimbabwe has an obligation to stop forced evictions and to protect the population from forced evictions.
- The Gunhill community previously faced forced eviction in July 2009 when the Deputy Mayor of Harare stated that the city authorities were considering evicting people from “illegal settlements and market places to restore order.” However, following campaigning by Amnesty International and a coalition of Zimbabwean organisations the threat was subsequently withdrawn by the Mayor of Harare.
- Through the Demand Dignity campaign, launched in May 2009, Amnesty International is calling on governments globally to take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies that comply with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions.
- 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/>