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Africa: Forced Evictions Reach Crisis Levels

By Amnesty International and COHRE

Research conducted by Amnesty International and the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) reveals that the practice of forced evictions has reached epidemic proportions in Africa, with more than three million Africans forcibly evicted from their homes since 2000. The two organizations today called on African governments to halt forced evictions and abide by their international human rights obligations.

"The figures are truly staggering and clearly indicate that forced evictions are one of the most widespread and unrecognised human rights violations in Africa," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

Although the practice of forced eviction has been recognised as a gross violation of human rights under international law and, in particular, by the African Commission, governments throughout Africa continue to forcibly evict hundreds of thousands of people from their homes each year. Many of these evictions are often

accompanied by further rights violations, including the use of excessive force by those carrying out the evictions, such as arbitrary arrests, beatings, rape, torture and even killings.

Jean du Plessis, Executive Director (Acting Interim) of COHRE, said, "Many African governments justify forced evictions on the grounds that they are essential for 'development' and therefore, in the interests of the general public good. However, development that leads to forced evictions is fundamentally counterproductive because forced evictions create homelessness, destroy property and productive assets, and obstruct access to potable water, sanitation, healthcare, livelihood opportunities and education. By carrying out forced evictions, African governments are pushing people into poverty—not pulling them out of it."

Kolawole Olaniyan of Amnesty International said, "By failing to bring an end to the practice of forced evictions, African leaders are violating their obligations to protect human rights and undermining their expressed commitments to development imperatives such as the Millennium Development Goals and NEPAD."

Examples of forced evictions from across the continent are as numerous as they are distressing. Some recent examples include:

An estimated two million people have been forcibly evicted from their homes and many thousands have been made homeless since 2000 in Nigeria.

More than 12,000 people were forcibly evicted from Dar Assalaam camp in Sudan in August 2006. The majority of the evictees had been previously displaced through conflict in Sudan and settled in camps in or around the capital Khartoum. Authorities have forcibly evicted thousands of people from these camps, resettling them in desert areas without access to clean water, food and other essentials. Currently, there are over four million internally displaced persons in Sudan.

The government of Zimbabwe staggered the international community in 2005 when, in a military style operation, it forced an estimated 700,000 people from their homes, their businesses or both. To date, the government has not taken any effective action to address the plight of those displaced.

In Luanda, the capital of Angola, at least 6,000 families have been forcibly evicted and had their homes demolished since 2001. Many of these families, who have received no compensation, had their property stolen by those carrying out the forced evictions and remain homeless.

In Kenya approximately 70,000 people have been forcibly evicted from their homes in forest areas since 2005, while at least 20,000 people have been forcibly evicted from neighbourhoods in or around Nairobi since 2000.

In Ghana over 7,000 people were made homeless when they were forcibly evicted by the Game and Wildlife Division from the Digya National Park in March and April 2006. The eviction was halted in April only after a boat carrying over 150 evictees capsized, causing the death of at least 10 people. Those remaining in the park still live under threat of forced eviction. Some 800 people also had their homes destroyed in Legion Village, Accra in May 2006, while approximately 30,000 people in the Agbogbloshie community of Accra have been threatened with forcible eviction since 2002.

At least 300 families in Equatorial Guinea have been forcibly evicted from their homes since 2004, when the government embarked on a programme of urban regeneration in Malabo and Bata. These families had title to their property. Thousands more remain at risk.

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