

URGENT ACTION

JUSTICE CLOSE FOR 800 FAMILIES IN BRAZIL

The families who suffered a violent forced eviction in August from the Olga Benário settlement in the south of São Paulo, have won a major victory in their long fight for housing rights.

Under local and international pressure, São Paulo state authorities have agreed to repossess the land from which they were evicted, along with an adjacent lot in Capão Redondo. The land will be used for the construction of social housing for the evicted families. The council has guaranteed emergency measures, such as rent assistance, while the construction takes place. Local NGOs have stated that the state government's radical change of tack was related in part to international pressure generated by Amnesty International's urgent action campaign.

After riot police forcibly evicted the families, in an operation that spread panic through the community and ended in a series of fires and widespread destruction, 500 of the original 800 families camped opposite the site in protest. There they endured horrendous conditions, without access to running water, food, toilets or electricity. Local health centres refused to treat the families and the children were excluded from their schools.

Municipal authorities first offered the families places in council hostels, which the families rejected because it was short-term and would break up the families, separating women and children from their husbands. Following national and international protest at the situation, the municipal government provided the families with emergency assistance, registering the families in the *bolsa aluguel* (rent grant) scheme. Continued pressure from the families and local NGOs for a long-term solution to the problem, culminated in the State government's recent decision. The families have set up the Olga Benário Association on a site near where the eviction took place, to monitor progress. Local NGOs are now pressing the Federal Government to inject funds to ensure that the families are adequately housed throughout the construction process.

São Paulo has a chronic shortage of housing for low-income families. A well organised homeless movement has been squatting empty buildings and derelict plots of land to meet the need of some poorest families in the city. These occupations have often been met with violence on the part of the police.

The Olga Benário eviction came following the failure of the government to provide adequate solutions after over a year of negotiations and several appeals against the eviction order. The state government's recent decision, if implemented, will finally give the families a long-term solution to their chronic problems.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Further Information on UA: 225/09 Index: AMR 19/021/2009 Issue Date: 18 December 2009

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