

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Equatorial Guinea: 300 families evicted and homeless**

Amnesty International is concerned about reports of recent forced evictions carried out in Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea which have left about 300 families homeless. The authorities must stop the continuing systematic practice of mass forced evictions.

Undermining the rule of law and due process, the authorities did not consult the residents, give them prior notice, eviction orders, assurances of adequate alternative housing, or the opportunity to contest the evictions.

The forced evictions accompanied by indiscriminate destruction of peoples' homes and possessions were carried out in the neighbourhoods of Atepa and Camaremy, in the Banapa district of Malabo, on 22 and 23 July 2006. On both occasions residents who protested against the demolition of their homes were shoved, slapped and intimidated by soldiers accompanying the demolition team. One Camaremy resident, Santiago Obama, was arrested and briefly detained at Malabo central police station for protesting the demolition of his home on 22 July.

The then Prime Minister, other government ministers, civilian authorities, armed soldiers and police officers were present during the demolitions, which started at 8.30 am. Some of the residents were not present when the demolitions started as they had already gone to work. Consequently, they were unable to rescue some of their possessions. The families were left homeless, as no adequate alternative accommodation was offered to them.

Amnesty International is concerned that evictions in Equatorial Guinea continue to be carried out without regard to due process as required under the country's own national laws and under international standards contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Equatorial Guinea is party. The need to evict residents for reasons of public safety, development projects, or the need to regulate urban development to improve secure access to adequate housing does not give licence to the authorities to disregard the health, welfare and basic human rights of its citizens.

In addition, Amnesty International is concerned that the lack of security of tenure afforded to those living in informal settlements means that thousands more families in Malabo and Bata, the main city on the mainland, are at risk of being forcibly evicted from their homes. In late April, residents in Comandachina, the most highly populated neighbourhood in Bata, were reportedly given three months to demolish their homes and build 2-3 storey houses instead, or leave the area. Others were reportedly told to leave the area, which was apparently needed to build a supermarket.

Amnesty International calls on the Equatorial Guinea authorities to stop all forced evictions and ensure that everyone is guaranteed a degree of security of tenure over the land they own or occupy. The organization

also calls on the authorities to provide assistance to the victims of forced evictions who remain without shelter and to ensure that they have access to effective remedies, including compensation for the loss of their homes and property.

The Equatorial Guinean authorities should also investigate thoroughly and impartially the reports of beating of residents by soldiers with a view to bringing to justice those suspected of wrongdoing.

### **Background**

"Forced eviction" is a term used internationally to describe evictions that are carried out without due process, with disregard for international standards. Forced evictions invariably affect the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. They increase social inequality and poverty and they frequently lead to social conflict.

Equatorial Guinea is Africa's third main oil producer with about 400,000 barrels per day. The new wealth brought about by the oil has led to pressure on the land for commercial purposes, as well as luxury housing. The authorities have embarked on a programme of rehabilitation of the main cities and infrastructure. According to reports, the authorities have on several occasions publicly expressed their intention to end "chabolismo" (shanty towns). However, according to reports, many of the houses demolished in the last two to three years were solid structures in well-established neighbourhoods and the vast majority of the occupants had titles to the land.

The neighbourhoods of Atepa and Camaremy are situated along the road joining Malabo airport to the municipality of Ela Nguema. In April 2006, government officials started marking houses for demolition in both neighbourhoods. Apparently when asked by residents about the purpose of the marking they reportedly responded that the houses were to be demolished to build a road. However, that section of the road has already been built and it is waiting only to be tarred. Furthermore, the houses are situated 80-90 metres from the road. The residents were not notified or consulted prior to the evictions and they did not have an opportunity to contest the authorities' decisions in court. Nor have they been compensated for the loss of their homes and other property which was deliberately destroyed during the evictions. All the families reportedly had titles to the land.

Forced evictions have been recognised by the UN Commission on Human Rights as a gross violation of a range of human rights, in particular, the right to adequate housing. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has defined forced evictions as "the permanent or temporary removal against the will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and or land which they occupy, without provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection."