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# SLUMS

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More than 200,000 communities in the world can be defined as slums. Referred to by many names – *bidonvilles*, *ghettos* or *the hood*, *bustees* or *chawls*, *favelas*, *barrios populares*, *informal settlements*, or simply *slums* – they are home to more than 1 billion people across all continents. These neighbourhoods share common characteristics such as inadequate housing, sanitation and drainage; poor water and electricity services; overcrowding; and high levels of violence. Many are classified as “illegal” or “unregularized”. The residents rarely have security of tenure, placing them at constant risk of forcible eviction. Their neighbourhoods are also, like all urban communities, places where residents live, work, eat, sleep and raise their children.

The world’s slum population is growing at alarming rates. Reasons for this include disinvestment in rural areas, conflict, natural disasters, climate change, denial of land and property rights, mass forced evictions, and the denial of housing due to corporate land grabbing and commercial projects. Some projections suggest that 2 billion people will be living in slums by 2030. Because of the absence of other affordable housing, people migrating to the cities are left with no alternative. If poverty is the world’s worst human rights crisis, slums are its most visible manifestation.

## HOME TO MULTIPLE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

People living in slums face obvious deprivation of resources and assets. Not only are they denied the right to adequate housing, but they are excluded from basic services such as safe water, sanitation, health and education. They also face high levels of insecurity due to the constant threat of violence from police and criminal gangs, and from being forcibly evicted with little or no warning. Access to justice is routinely denied because of discrimination

and because whole communities are treated as criminals.

In the processes and decisions that impact on their lives, people living in slums are routinely denied a voice. They are not consulted or allowed to participate in decision-making processes about upgrading their homes or arranging alternative housing when a forced eviction is planned.

Far from being a problem exclusive to developing countries, there are similar issues of deprivation, insecurity, exclusion and lack of voice in and around European cities, poor neighbourhoods in the USA, and in areas reserved for Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Australia.

The Roma in Italy are denied access to national health and other social services because their housing has not been authorized by the state. Romani camps have been destroyed and people forcibly evicted because of negative stereotypes and discrimination. In Slovakia, Romani settlements have no public facilities such as schools, medical centres, hospitals, libraries or public laundries, as well as a complete lack of public transport. These communities are excluded from the rest of the population, directly leading to further deprivation.

Women are particularly vulnerable in slums. In Brazil, women interviewed by Amnesty International have described the difficulties they face when trying to report domestic or other forms of violence to the police. In places where there is no sanitation, women have to walk to remote areas or wait until dark for privacy in order to go to the toilet, increasing their risk of sexual assault and harassment.

The people who live crammed in slums suffer many different human rights violations. These violations are inextricably linked; all are unacceptable. The Demand Dignity campaign is working globally to stop the human rights abuses that scar and

**Maria Sebastião António, a 31-year-old mother of three, lives in Banga Wé, near Luanda, Angola. Several attempts were made to evict her family and more than 500 people from their neighbourhood in order to make room for the Nova Vida (New Life) housing project. This is her story.**

**I have lived in Banga Wé all my life. I was born here. From 2004 until 2006 there were demolitions here. We were not even warned about the demolitions. We were just taken by surprise. We had to go to work every day and never knew whether we would find our homes when we returned.**

**I used to have a house made of [concrete] blocks, but it was destroyed in the demolitions in November 2005. I was pregnant with my youngest child at the time. They destroyed my house made of blocks but did not touch the zinc sheets used for the roof, so we used them to build a house of zinc... they came back about six days later to destroy the zinc houses as well... I was taken to the police station because I resisted the demolitions and was threatened. A police officer said to me, “The police do not beat on the streets; they beat in the *esquadra* [police station].” Luckily another police officer stopped him from beating me.**

**Before the elections in 2008, the Director of the Nova Vida housing project called a meeting and told us we would be moved to new houses in Zango III, but nothing has happened. We don’t have water. Our children are not allowed to study. The Nova Vida School is not even allowing our children to register. The other schools are too far away. The worst thing is that there is still no solution to this problem.**

**Cover: A boy goes to collect water, walking on a municipal water pipe that cuts through Mumbai’s biggest slum, Dharavi, a thriving mix of poverty and enterprise, India, 2008.**

**Right: A woman carrying a baby walks past a Brazilian police officer patrolling Rocinha, one of the largest favelas in Brazil, during a police operation, Rio de Janeiro, 31 October 2005.**



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*'If you have a gun you are not safe because bad men attack men who they know have a gun. If you don't have a gun you are still not safe, because anyone can come and kill you, including the police. And even if you didn't do anything you are not safe, because if someone close to you did something to the gangs and they cannot find him they will come and find you.'*

Woman from a garrison community, Kingston, Jamaica, October 2007

confine lives, destroy hopes and dreams, and keep people mired in poverty.

## DENIED SECURITY – FORCED EVICTIONS

Areas designated as slums generally do not meet adequate housing requirements as defined by international human rights law. Despite this, many governments fail to take even the minimum and immediate steps required to guarantee people's right to adequate housing. Instead, they resort to removing people from their homes without observing due process of law, without respecting safeguards set out in international standards, and without offering adequate alternatives.

Forced evictions are a violation of human rights that governments are obliged to prohibit and prevent. People living in slums routinely experience this violation and live every day under its looming shadow. Mass forced evictions are increasingly being carried out by governments. Many slums are being demolished to make way for urban development such as in Angola and

Cambodia, or city beautification projects or during preparations for international mega-events, such as the Olympics in Beijing. In these cases, as the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) notes: "It is always the poor who are evicted – wealthier population groups virtually never face forced eviction, and never mass eviction."

Forced evictions often involve the use of excessive force by the police or other agents. Other human rights violations documented in forced evictions include rape, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and unlawful killings.

The effects of forced evictions are catastrophic, especially for those who repeatedly suffer this abuse. Forced evictions often result in people losing their personal possessions, social networks, and access to work and services such as schools. People may become homeless or find themselves living in worse situations than before. Women suffer disproportionately due to widespread gender discrimination in property rights.

A **forced eviction** is the removal of people against their will from the homes or land they occupy, when that removal takes place without legal protections and other safeguards. Not every eviction that is carried out by force constitutes a forced eviction – if appropriate safeguards are followed, a lawful eviction that involves the use of force does not violate the prohibition on forced evictions.

## DENIED ACCESS TO SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Because of the perceived illegality of slums, their residents frequently do not enjoy state protections or services that others do, and that are required under international human rights law. Many people living in slums rent their homes from private landowners or developers. Some pay disproportionately high rents to live in overcrowded and inadequate





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housing because rent control legislation often does not apply to areas considered by the authorities to be “unregularized”.

An estimated 30 to 50 per cent of urban residents in the developing world lack any legal papers guaranteeing security of tenure, according to UN-Habitat’s report covering 2006/7. This lack of documentation and recognition of a formal address not only increases people’s susceptibility to forced eviction, but also restricts access to credit, public services and formal employment

People living in slums are often in or on the outskirts of urban areas that generally have good access to health, education and other services. These services, however, are not evenly distributed. Slum-dwellers have much less access to such services than residents of non-slum areas, despite their proximity to service providers. As a result, the rates of malnutrition and child mortality among people living in slums often match those living in rural areas, according to UN-Habitat.

The lack of formal recognition of slums also excludes the residents from the planning and budgeting of future services.

Contrary to international human rights law obligations, many states fail to prioritize the most vulnerable people when allocating resources. States should also prioritize the fulfilment of human rights, such as providing free primary education, essential primary health care, access to safe water for domestic use, and essential levels of food required to be free of hunger. The delivery of these services is a human rights issue,

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**Mashimoni Squatters’ primary school in Kibera slum, Nairobi, Kenya. With 528,000 residents, according to the 1999 census, Kibera is the largest of Nairobi’s “informal settlements”. Its nine “villages” are squeezed between the city centre and the wealthy suburbs of Karen, Lang’ata and Lavington, reserved in colonial times for European settlement.**



A family who were forcibly evicted from Street 202 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital, outside their shelter in Chambok Thom, one of the many inadequate resettlement sites near the city, February 2008

sanitation all contribute to an increased risk of ill-health. Lack of proper sanitation, for example, includes people having to use “hanging latrines” (stalls made out of wood or rags, often precariously balanced over open water sources or mud pits) or “flying toilets” (small plastic bags residents use to throw out their toilet waste).

The absence of primary and secondary health facilities within many slums, the travelling and costs involved, and the exclusion of people who lack documents act as barriers to accessing health care. Only 10 to 20 per cent of women in the slums of Kenya, Mali, Rwanda and Uganda give birth with the help of skilled health personnel compared to between 68 and 86 per cent in non-slum urban areas, according to the UN Population Fund's 2007 world report.

Similarly, the lack of sufficient primary and secondary schools within or near slums, the costs related to education, and denial of admission to children because their home is unofficial severely restrict access to education.

The absence of official documentation doesn't just render people's homes vulnerable. It can also negatively affect their ability to access food from the public distribution system, or social security and other benefits. Often, people who live in slums without official documentation are also denied the right to participate through voting as well.

## DENIED ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND PROTECTION

The negative perceptions of people living in slums have contributed directly to a serious deterioration in public security in

In the early morning on 24 January 2009, around 250 Cambodian security forces and demolition workers used tear gas and threats of violence to forcibly evict hundreds of families from Dey Kraham community in central Phnom Penh. At 6am, excavators moved in and flattened the village. Human rights workers reported that 152 families living on the site permanently and up to 250 temporary settlers lost their homes. Some people didn't even have time to retrieve belongings from their homes.

The Phnom Penh authorities initially provided fewer than 30 of the families with shelter at a designated resettlement site at Cham Chao commune, Dangkor district, around 16 kilometres from the city centre. On arrival, the families found there was no clean water, no electricity, no sewerage or basic services. Most of the structures were under construction and lacked roofs.

The company that had allegedly bought the Dey Kraham land withdrew earlier offers of compensation.

which the government is expected to guarantee without discrimination of any kind.

The global trend towards privatization of state services carries the risk that governments will relinquish much of their responsibility to oversee the provision of education, health and water. Deregulation of markets may mean private sector companies have little incentive to service low-income communities.

In Nairobi, Kenya, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) highlighted that although informal settlements housed approximately 55 per cent of the city's population they were excluded from city authority planning and budgeting processes. Various water pipes pass through Kibera, a large slum south-west of Nairobi city centre, but residents are forced to buy water from entrepreneurs who charge between three and 30 times the normal rate.

The location of many slums in hazardous or polluted areas, the lack of durable housing and inadequate access to safe water and

these communities. Slum-dwellers are more likely to be victims of both gang and police violence. Where police protection is provided, it is often very limited. In slums in Brazil, Jamaica and Kenya, excessive use of force by the police while conducting operations, unlawful killings and in some cases extrajudicial executions have all been documented by Amnesty International.

In Brazil, large police incursions into favelas have been accompanied by indiscriminate and abusive searches under collective warrants that allow the police to target the whole community. Women have also suffered verbal, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of the police. In both Brazil and Jamaica, people say they have been treated with disrespect, prejudice, contempt and discrimination by the police because of the perception of the entire community as criminal or accomplices to crime.

People living in slums often suffer disproportionately from violent crime because of governments' failure to provide public security. In 2006, for example, official statistics for São Paulo showed a striking difference in the homicide rate between the socially deprived district of Brasilândia (46.24 per 100,000) and the more affluent area of Vila Mariana (14.95 per 100,000).

This abnegation of responsibility by the state and its failure to offer protection to slum communities in Brazil and Jamaica has allowed criminal gangs and drug factions to dominate virtually every aspect of life. Residents may not be able to leave their homes during curfews imposed by gangs, or attend schools, workplaces and nearby health centres when they are located in a rival gang's territory. They may be punished violently if they or their relatives break rules imposed by such groups. Residents also face violence or intimidation from "slumlords" or their agents for payment of rents.

## ***'We can't bear to lose any more friends, relatives and children to armed violence. Changing this deadly scenario is urgent.'***

Hércules Mendes, President of the Caracol residents' association, Complexo de Penha (a group of marginalized favelas in Rio de Janeiro that is beset by police and gang violence), March 2007

In a number of cases, slum residents who have tried to report crimes or make complaints about the conduct of state officials have reported difficulties in getting their cases registered, investigated or prosecuted. People may be denied access to meaningful and effective remedy, a key obligation of the state under international human rights law. The remedies that exist may also be ineffective in providing reparation to victims, including compensation or rehabilitation.

### **DENIED A VOICE**

People living in slums are part of the city, no less than others, yet their right to participate in planning and budgetary processes is often violated. The participation of these communities is crucial in addressing the discrimination they experience, and in ensuring their rights to services and resources are met. This lack of formal recognition and overt discrimination means that people living in slums are denied a voice in determining the future development of their communities. When their participation is denied, insecurity is heightened and discriminatory policing environments and barriers to justice are often created.

### **WHY ACTION IS REQUIRED**

The scale of the human rights violations experienced by people living in slums is staggering both in terms of the numbers affected and the compound impact on their lives. Governments have failed to address these issues at both national and international levels. The Millennium Development Goals set a target of improving the lives of 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020. However, this ignores

the needs of the remaining 1.3 billion people who, according to conservative estimates, will be living in slums by that date. Even if the current slum population does not grow at the projected rate, the international community has committed to improving the lives of only one in 10 of those living in inadequate and insecure housing. For the other 900 million slum dwellers, the human rights violations that accompany life in the slums will continue unabated.

Slums are the consequence of negligence and discrimination by governments and other actors. Many community-based organizations, national and international NGOs and agencies have worked for decades to ensure that governments respond individually and collectively to the challenges of improving the lives of slum-dwellers. Amnesty International, through the Demand Dignity campaign, is joining these organizations to address the human rights violations experienced by people living in slums – one of the starkest demonstrations of human rights violations as a cause and consequence of poverty.

The protection of human rights must be at the core of efforts to eradicate poverty. This document highlights how people living in slums are not only deprived of their basic resources, but also face insecurity, exclusion from services and processes, and are ignored by those in power. A human rights approach moves the debate about poverty from what people do not have (resources) to what they already have (dignity and human rights). It demands that governments and other actors respect international law and basic human dignity in any approach to slums and poverty.

# DEMAND DIGNITY

## IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED

### ■ End forced evictions

Governments should take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies in accordance with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions.

### ■ Ensure equal access to public services for people living in slums

Governments must combat direct and indirect discrimination against people living in slums. Legislation and provisions that have a discriminatory effect must be reviewed, amended or repealed. Governments must ensure that people living in slums have equal access to water, sanitation, health care, housing, education, and fair and effective policing.

### ■ Allow for and ensure the active participation of people living in slums in all plans and projects directed at slum upgrading

Governments must end repression against slum-dwellers and those working with them. They must take effective measures and remove obstacles to ensure the active participation of people living in slums in any upgrading, planning and budgeting processes that affect their lives directly or indirectly. Any upgrading initiatives or housing programmes and policies should be consistent with international human rights standards, particularly on the right to adequate housing.

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