

19 July 2016
Port Harcourt,
Rivers, Nigeria



JOINT PRESS STATEMENT: COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS
CONDEMN FORCED EVICTIONS AT EAGLE ISLAND AND DECRY THREAT OF
FURTHER EVICTIONS LOOMING OVER MORE THAN 60,000 IN 17
COMMUNITIES IN PORT HARCOURT

Less than two weeks after the forced eviction of thousands of hard-working urban poor living at Andoni Village and Redeemed Village, Eagle Island, on 15 July 2016 the Rivers State Government has announced that 17 more entire communities in Port Harcourt will be evicted with only 7 days' wholly inadequate notice via radio broadcast. Should the Government proceed with its threats, an estimated 60,000 persons will be rendered homeless and driven into poverty by loss of livelihoods and other hardships associated with homelessness and displacement.

We, the undersigned communities and members of civil society, decry this unlawful and callous threat and call for the Rivers State Government to seriously reconsider its plans before it takes irreversible action that violates the fundamental human rights of 60,000 innocent persons and undermines the security and long-term development goals of all residents of Port Harcourt.

Any person that has witnessed the horrors of forced eviction, where persons are thrown out of their homes and have their livelihoods and communities destroyed overnight, cannot believe this is the path to security and development of our society. Studies have shown the terrible long-term impacts of forced evictions on the incomes, health, and education of evictees.

We understand that His Excellency, Governor Wike, has cited the 2015 amendments to the Rivers State Anti-Kidnapping Law to justify the recent spate of demolitions and threatened evictions. Yet, the reality is that the demolitions being carried out are not targeted at actual kidnappers; instead, they are a pretext for evicting thousands of innocent children, women, men, and elderly persons who are employed in legitimate businesses through which they eke out their modest livings, and from which they pay their children's school fees and Government taxes and fees. Such persons live in Port Harcourt's informal settlements because of the lack of affordable housing in the formal sector and make positive contributions every day to the city's economy.

The false impression given to the public must be corrected. The Anti-Kidnapping Law does not authorize mass evictions nor does it allow the demolition of properties before the persons accused of kidnapping offenses under the law are arrested, prosecuted, and found guilty in line with the right to fair hearing protected by Section 36 of the 1999 Constitution.

If the Government is allowed to so flagrantly evade the rule of law and take the law into its own hands to trample on the rights of thousands of innocent citizens, then all of society will suffer. Injustice will not stop with the poor and those living in informal settlements. The greed for land will render no one safe from eviction and seizure of all that he or she has worked for in his life.

We are members of the affected communities. We are members of other communities in Port Harcourt who fear that we will be next should our brothers and sisters fall to the present threat. We are members of communities from as far away as Lagos who stand in solidarity with those who are under threat today. We are members of civil society who work with the affected communities, visit them on a regular basis, and know their realities.

We know the communities under threat are ready to work with government in any legitimate law enforcement approach to resolving security concerns and rooting out criminals who may be hiding in different corners of the city. We know the communities under threat are ready to partner with government to improve their infrastructure and quality of life through *in situ* upgrading.

We also know that no good can come of the present threat of eviction, just as no good has come from the long list of prior forced evictions in Port Harcourt. Is our society safer today? Is poverty lessened? Have we gotten rid of informal settlements or simply pushed them from one place to another? We must all ask ourselves these questions rather than blindly following our fears.

Already, thousands are homeless and destitute from the evictions in Eagle Island two weeks ago. Should the Government proceed with the plan outlined on radio on 15 July 2016, over 60,000 more innocent Nigerians will be forced out of their homes and businesses and communities. This is a gross violation of these citizens' right to fair hearing, right to property, right to adequate shelter, and will equally undermine their right to health and right to education of their children.

We are deeply concerned that the Government would run roughshod over all these rights in the present-day democratic dispensation; we call for a break from the past of such abuses and for Government to partner with us – communities and civil society – to find a better way forward.

SIGNED:

Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI)
www.justempower.org

Social Action
www.saction.org

Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation
www.facebook.com/NigerianFederation.net

Stakeholders Democracy Network (SDN)
www.stakeholderdemocracy.org

Collaborative Media Advocacy Platform (CMAP)
www.cmapping.net

Communities under threat:

Awgu Waterfront
Elechi Phase I Waterfront
Elechi Phase II Waterfront
Urualla Waterfront
Ojike Waterfront

Afikpo/Awkuzu Waterfront
Abba Waterfront
Nanka Waterfront
Akokwa Waterfront
Egede Waterfront

Soku Waterfront
Timber Waterfront
Echue Waterfront
Obiodansor Waterfront
Anozie Waterfront