

June 29, 2012
Port Harcourt, Nigeria



ABONNEMA WHARF COMMUNITY DEMOLISHED BY THE RIVERS STATE GOVERNMENT IN FLAGRANT DISREGARD OF JUDICIAL PROCESS

The Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) strongly condemns the on-going demolition of Abonnema community by the Rivers state government. The invasion and destruction of the homes, properties and businesses of residents of the community without the due process of law is callous, unjust, illegal and a reckless affront to constitutional governance.

On Wednesday June 27, 2012, at about 6.00 am, the Rivers state government's demolition squad assisted by heavily armed police and other security forces invaded the Abonnema Wharf community located on the Port-Harcourt waterfront. Without warning, bulldozers began to tear down homes and other structures in the community as residents that were rudely awakened by the violence fled in utter consternation. Residents that attempted to salvage personal properties were brutally beaten by members of the demolition squad. The demolition continued until about 7 pm.

At the time of this press statement on June 29, 2012 the Rivers state government has continued its ruthless forced eviction of the Abonnema Wharf community destroying several hundred homes, properties and livelihoods of an estimated 25,000 families without any safeguards or resettlement.

The demolition of Abonnema community is being carried out in flagrant disregard of judicial process. On behalf of the community, SERAC obtained an order of interim injunction restraining the Rivers state government from destroying the community on November 11, 2011 in *Jim George & Others vs. The Executive Governor of Rivers State & Others (Suit No. PHC/2286/2009)*. A ruling on a contested application of the government to vacate the interim order of injunction was fixed for July 2, 2012. Despite the pendency of this lawsuit and a subsisting order of interim injunction, the Rivers state government has proceeded, lawlessly, to destroy the community.

The government's suggestion that Abonnema Wharf is being demolished in order to rid the community of criminals is as unconscionable as it is absurd. Nowhere in the laws of Nigeria is demolition authorized as a crime fighting strategy. This is yet another pitiful excuse to justify the indefensible action of the government.

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At the core of the decision to destroy Abonnema Wharf community, like it destroyed Njemanze and other waterfront communities in 2009, is Governor Rotimi Amaechi administration's unbridled quest to acquire prime waterfront lands in favor of private businesses for upscale entertainment and other investments. Under the guise of public-private partnerships, the government has continued to utilize taxpayers' resources and state instruments to advance the parochial interests of its affluent business collaborators to the extreme detriment of desperately poor citizens of the state. Since his inauguration, Governor Amaechi has vigorously pursued a land grab policy that has resulted in the painful displacement of hundreds of thousands of poor citizens.

Forced eviction entails the removal of people from their land and homes against their will and without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protections. The forced eviction of Abonnema Wharf constitutes a brazen violation of the human rights to adequate housing, dignity of the human person, private and family life, fair hearing and, indeed, the right to life as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other human rights instruments.

SERAC demands an immediate end to the ongoing demolition of Abonnema Wharf community. We further demand an end to the violence and brutality that is being perpetrated against innocent citizens of the community.

We strongly urge the government of Rivers State to immediately provide emergency shelter and other services to the displaced population, and take expeditious steps to provide adequate compensation or resettlement to affected residents.

We further urge Governor Rotimi Amaechi to observe observance of the rule of law in dealing with these populations, and to bring his strayed administration back on a path of constitutional democracy.

Signed

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