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Kenya: More than 50,000 people at risk of imminent forced eviction

Kenya's government should halt the proposed eviction of more than 50,000 people living alongside the country's railway lines until guidelines that conform with international human rights standards have been adopted, Amnesty International said today.

On 21 March Kenya Railways published a notice giving residents 30 days to pull down their structures and leave, or risk prosecution. Most of those affected are slum dwellers in parts of Nairobi.

"People have been living and working on these lands for years and a thirty-day notice period is wholly inadequate," said Justus Nyang'aya, Director of Amnesty International Kenya. "Without proper safeguards the proposed mass evictions will have a devastating impact on people's access to water, sanitation, food and schools and could well create a humanitarian emergency."

"They will result in forced evictions, which contravene Kenya's obligations under international human rights laws."

While it is recognised that the government is taking important steps to upgrade the railway system, for the tens of thousands of people living in the affected area, the demolition of homes and informal businesses will be socially and economically disastrous.

To date, no comprehensive resettlement or compensation plan has been announced and the government appears to have made no provision for those who will lose their homes, livelihoods, possessions and social networks as a result of the project.

Under international human rights law, evictions should only be carried out as a last resort and only after all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored in genuine consultation with affected communities.

Governments are also obliged to ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction.

"Kenya's government is failing to deliver on its promise to put in place guidelines which comply with international human rights law regarding evictions and until it does it should halt all mass evictions of this nature," said Justus Nyang'aya. "To put 50,000 of your poorest and most vulnerable citizens at risk of homelessness is unacceptable."

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