

UPDATE ON EVICTIONS & DEMOLITIONS IN PORT HARCOURT

Record of Events from 18th June – 6th August 2009

DAY/DATE	EVENT	OUTCOME
THURSDAY 18/06/09	The Housing Policy Unit of the UN-HABITAT released a draft report of the UN-HABITAT fact-finding mission on Port Harcourt Evictions and sent a copy to the Government of Rivers State.	The state government promptly acknowledged the UN-HABITAT Report by threatening to embark upon outright demolition of all the waterfronts in Port Harcourt and that it was under no obligation to resettle the affected tenants.
TUESDAY 30/06/09	The State Government dispatched a team of demolition squad to the township axis of Port Harcourt waterfronts to pull down the entire residential buildings in the area, which provide housing accommodation to more than One-fourth of the population of Port Harcourt, the state capital. The squad was constituted of officials of the Ministry of Urban Development and a detachment of armed members of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) – See Annexure A.	Residents of the area, especially the women, widows in particular, came out <i>en mass</i> and resisted the squad from carrying out the demolition. The action sparked off spontaneous demonstration, which was depicted by carrying of green leaves and branches of green trees as a symbol of their quest for peaceful approach to the demolition– See Annexure B.
MONDAY	The protesting women residents regrouped, which came in a large number, rule of law and due process approach in carrying the contemplated evictions and demolitions in the waterfront areas – See Annexure C.	The State Executive Governor, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Amaechi being adamant to the protest, vowed that it is only God in Heaven that can stop him from carrying out the demolition in the way and manner he wanted. There were various newspaper publications to this very effect.
WEDNESDAY 06/07/09	The High Chiefs of Okrika ethnic nationals, being owners of Port Harcourt waterfronts, met with the State Governor to address the need to follow due process of eviction and the rule of law in carrying out the urban renewal requested government to reclaim the neighboring mangrove swamps and relocated them to the area.	The State Government declined to their request and announced its decision to engage full military services comprising the land, air and sea bombardments to evict the residents in the event that they resist the demolition squad that will be detailed to the area– there are several newspaper publications to this effect.

<p>MONDAY 13/07/09</p>	<p>Being frightened by the planned approach to the demolition joined with the governor's threat that only God could stop him from carrying out the demolition in the way and manner he planned it, the entire waterfront residents in the town axis of Port Harcourt took the case to God by embarking on a one-day fasting and prayer protest, which took place at the centre of Aggrey Road in Port Harcourt and lasted for the whole day.</p>	<p>As the prayer/fasting were going on, the state governor personally went on to announce that all the buildings at Abonnema Wharf and Njemanze waterfronts in the Diobu axis of Port Harcourt will be destroyed before the end of July 2009. These houses provide shelter for over 10 percent of the population of Port Harcourt and were earmarked for destruction without arrangement to relocate the residents, majority of who have their means of livelihood close to their houses.</p>
<p>TUESDAY 14/07/09</p>	<p>The news of the planned demolition of the houses at Abonnema Wharf and Njemanze waterfronts triggered over 2,000 thousands residents of the area, especially the women into a sudden demonstration, which equally lasted for the whole day and nearly brought about an open confrontation between the protesters and the military operatives sent by government to attack the protesters.</p>	<p>Government emphasized that there was no going back in the demolition of Abonnema Wharf and Njemanze waterfronts as planned, and publicly accused the demonstrators that they were sponsored by governor's political enemies – Secretary to the State Government specifically stated this in his press statement.</p>
<p>TUESDAY 21/07/09</p>	<p>The National Union of Tenants of Nigeria wrote to Secretary to the State Government asking for a meeting with government to address the issue of waterfronts demolition with a view to finding a way forward.</p>	<p>The Secretary to Government snubbed the request.</p>
<p>THURSDAY 30/07/09</p>	<p>The High Chiefs of Okrika ethnic nationality filed a suit at the Federal High Court of Nigeria, as owners of the entire waterfronts in Port Harcourt, and obtained the Leave of the Court to enforce their fundamental right to housing and family life. The Leave is also to restrain the Chiefs of Army Staff, Air Staff and Naval Staff as well as Inspector-General of Police from being used by the government to carry out military attack on the waterfront residents, in an effort to evict them forcefully from their accommodation, as contemplated by the state government.</p>	<p>The State Government snubbed order of the court and restated its decision to employ the services of the four spheres of the military in carrying out its planned forced eviction of waterfronts residents – see Annexure D and E for the press report on this threats.</p>

WEDNESDAY 05/08/09	As the threatened demolition of waterfronts houses became vivid, tenants of Njemanze waterfront houses organized a “one-million man” match to assist them with alternative accommodation before embarking upon the demolition of their houses. The group that undertook the mission was upto 2,000 tenants, including women and children.	The State Government reacted to the appeal by using the JTF to arrest all the people that partook in the appeal mission. None of the people has since returned to their houses as at 06/08/09 and no official statement has been made by government concerning their whereabouts.
THURSDAY 06/08/09	The State Government dispatched a team of Government Press to undertake a video survey of Abonnema Wharf waterfront for the purpose of demolition.	Residents of Abonnema Wharf waterfront physically resisted the Press from entering the area. This was done notwithstanding the intervention of the JTF and members of the State Security Services. The resistance almost resulted in a serious breach of law and order in the area.

NOTE:

The waterfronts settlement is a densely populated part of the City of Port Harcourt and, according to the State Government’s population analysis, constitutes upto one-fourth of the total population of the city or more than 200,000 families made up of the poor people, the widows, age persons and the low-income class in particular.

The area has existed as far back as 1913 and occupied by an indigenous group called the Okrikans, who belong to the riverine community in the Ijaw ethnic nationality of the crisis-ridden Niger Delta region. The purpose for which the entire area is sought for demolition is for promotion of private businesses.

For in stance, the entire waterfronts in the Diobu axis of Port Harcourt, which include Abonnema Wharf, Njemanze and Elechi Beach waterfronts etcetera, is being sought for demolition in order to donate the land to Silverbird Group for its private cinema business.

Meanwhile, the whole demolition exercise is contemplated by the state government to relocate the affected residents who constitute more than 25 percent of the total population of Port Harcourt.

Source: Nigerian Tenants Union, August 2009

