

March 8, 2010
Abuja, Nigeria



Press Statement

The Planned Demolition of Lugbe Community, Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) Abuja

The Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC), is deeply concerned about the recent plans by the FCT Department of Development Control to forcibly evict, and demolish the homes of Lugbe residents, a suburb of the FCT located along the International Airport Road, Abuja. The demolitions, previously scheduled to commence on February 28, 2010, is targeting non-indigenes in Lugbe and its environs. This latest trend of demolishing structures belonging to non-indigenes in the FCT started in August 2009 following the then demolition of “illegal structures” in Sauka, Todge, Gosa and many human settlements along that corridor.

The FCT Deputy Director, Department of Development Control, Alhaji Hamza Madaki announced the demolition plans at a meeting with representatives of the Lugbe Development Community Association. The current demolitions are being planned without counterpart provisions for compensation, rehabilitation or resettlement to over 200,000 families that would be adversely affected. As Madaki confirmed, “the FCT Act of 1976 did not envisage the influx of non-indigenes into these surburbs, and therefore, affected persons are not entitled to relocation after their houses are demolished...” Large numbers of the residents have lived on the area for over two decades and have enjoyed uninterrupted possession over the years.

The Lugbe community representatives expressed grave concerns about the lack of policy continuation by the current administration of the FCT led by Senator Mohammad Adamu Aliero. They claim to have entered into an agreement with the former FCT Minister, Alhaji Aliyu Modibbo to integrate Lugbe community into the Abuja Master plan. The community further stated that they had presented a proposal to the FCT authorities that affirmed their plans to redesign the community into a satellite model village using their own resources and self-help construction efforts. They even went as far as contacting four banks that were ready to finance the project and a private developer. For these reasons, the community is demanding that what they agreed with Dr. Modibbo should be observed.

Between 2003 and 2007 when Malam Nasir Ahmed el-Rufai held sway as the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) launched and implemented a policy of mass forced evictions in Abuja in an attempt to restore what they termed as restoration of the original Abuja Master Plan. Consequently, an estimated 800,000 people lost their homes, schools, worship places and businesses during the exercise with spiralling effects on health, education, employment, and family cohesion. Some of the demolitions were accompanied by massive human rights violations and violence perpetrated by heavily armed security operatives against residents and business owners.

SERAC finds it particularly disturbing that Nigeria’s democratic government, akin to the military regimes that preceded it, continues to see and to use forced evictions as a preferred strategy for urban planning and development. Following the path of authoritarianism and arbitrariness in governance, the FCT administration

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has served as a vehicle for the unrestrained dispossession of the poor of their lands for the benefit of affluent and politically networked developers under the guise of the implementation of the 30-year-old master plan. Forced evictions are defined as the removal, against their will, of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection. They constitute a gross violation of human rights. The Federal Capital Territory's demolitions are flagrant violations of the rights to adequate housing, to dignity of the human person, to private and family life, 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 various other human rights instruments.

SERAC identifies with the efforts of the FCT administration to make Abuja, a modern capital city that will be on par with other capital cities in the world. However, we find unacceptable the practice of scheduling demolitions and evictions of vulnerable populations anywhere within the Federal Capital Territory, without providing compensation or alternative accommodation. Furthermore, we are further outraged by the FCT administration's refusal to consider the redevelopment proposals offered by the community. On point, paragraph 16 of the United Nations Comprehensive Guidelines on Development-Based Displacement provides that "all affected persons, including women, children and indigenous peoples shall have the right to all relevant information and the right to full participation and consultation throughout the entire process and to propose any alternatives".

We therefore urge the FCT Minister, Alhaji Adamu Aliero and the Department of Development Control to immediately stop action on all planned demolitions of people's homes, schools and businesses in Lugbe and environs. We specifically demand the FCT administration to abide by its binding legal obligations under Nigeria's Constitution, as well as regional and international human rights laws to provide effective legal remedy and redress to the victims of previous demolitions and housing rights violations in the Federal Capital Territory.

Signed:

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