



Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
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Football over Families: Human Rights Groups Denounce Haitian Government's Unlawful Eviction of Homeless Earthquake Survivors from Stadium

Haitian Government Uses Economic Coercion to Illegally Evict Families Displaced by the Earthquake

(Port-au-Prince, July 21, 2011)— The Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) and the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) denounce the Haitian government's unlawful eviction earlier this week of a camp of displaced earthquake survivors taking refuge in a sports stadium parking lot in downtown Port-au-Prince. The government's removal of 514 families from the stadium without providing them with adequate due process protections and suitable housing alternatives violates both Haitian and international law, including an order by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights mandating the Haitian government to protect its displaced population from forced evictions.

On Monday, agents of Mayor Jean-Yves Jason used bulldozers and tractors to raze the last remaining tents of the camp in Sylvio Cator Stadium's parking lot to clear it in time for a soccer match, according to an investigation by human rights monitors with IJDH and BAI. The stadium was on the Martelly administration's list for the six "most visible" displacement camps to be closed within President Martelly's first 100 days in office.

Under the watch of a large, well-armed police and private security presence, government agents threatened to forcibly remove those families who remained in the stadium after the government's arbitrary deadline of July 18. While some families received compensation – a check for 10,000 *gourdes* (US \$250) – to leave the stadium, many did not. Several families, however, who did receive checks told IJDH and BAI lawyers that the amounts were grossly insufficient to meet their families' housing needs, but they accepted the payments nonetheless. "A population suffering without access to healthcare, potable water, sanitation and other services will accept money in the short-term out of desperation," said BAI Managing Attorney Mario Joseph, "especially when they know there is no alternative." The money was reported to have come from both the Martelly administration and the local mayor's office.

"The offer of small sums of money, in the face of skyrocketing rents and a dearth of low-income housing options, and unaccompanied by comprehensive assistance to find adequate housing, amounts to economic coercion," explained IJDH-BAI housing rights attorney, Jeena Shah. "In addition to violating the right to housing recognized by the Haitian Constitution, it fails to serve as a durable solution to displacement as required under international law." Similar methods previously used by the government have merely resulted in displaced families leaving their camps to move to the street, other camps, precarious ravines, or houses rendered uninhabitable by the earthquake.

Some families were relocated from Sylvio Cator Stadium to a small patch of land designated by the government for resettlement. Families who arrived at the relocation site, located in a particularly dangerous section of Port-au-Prince, found it devoid of potable water, sanitation facilities, and security. Instead, they found a rubbish-strewn field equipped with a small number of grossly inadequate tents – they appeared to house a maximum of 2-3 persons, while the average family size is 5, stood no more than 4 feet tall, and were not rainproof. The government charged displaced people a tenth of their relocation allowance for their new shelter, if they were given one at all. In the middle of the field also stood a large, dilapidated house flooded with almost a foot of filthy water and trash, threatening to act as a breeding ground for disease.

“The conditions we observed at the relocation site were shamefully inadequate to meet the needs of displaced families,” said IJDH-BAI attorney, Beatrice Lindstrom. “And given that Haiti is in the midst of a raging cholera epidemic and hurricane season, the conditions were no less than inhumane and amount to a gross violation of human rights.”

IJDH and BAI join a chorus of Haitian and international rights organizations in urging President Martelly to put durable housing solutions at the center of his reconstruction agenda and to ensure that all members of his government, including the mayors of Haiti’s cities, do the same. The Martelly administration and the international community must prioritize the well-being of Haiti’s most vulnerable citizens. The reconstruction of Haiti cannot afford their exclusion.

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