

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

Côte d'Ivoire: Thousands of families still awaiting support measures after forced evictions in Abidjan

- Tens of thousands of people evicted since January 2024 from the Gesco, Boribana, Banco 1 and Abattoir neighbourhoods
- Evictions without adequate and reasonable prior notice, some involving violence; children deprived of education; 133 farmers lost their livelihoods
- Support measures announced in March 2024 must be urgently implemented for all affected people.

The Ivorian authorities must immediately guarantee the rights of the tens of thousands of people evicted and suspend mass evictions in Abidjan until safeguards are put in place to prohibit forced evictions and to ensure the protection of the rights of people potentially affected, said Amnesty International.

Large-scale operations to demolish neighbourhoods and evict their inhabitants were launched in January 2024, on sites notably considered to be at risk of flooding. The Gesco, Boribana, Banco 1 and Abattoir neighbourhoods were demolished as part of a plan to demolish 176 sites, according to an official communique dated 26 February 2024 of the autonomous district of Abidjan.

Evicted families Amnesty International spoke with shared that they were not meaningfully informed nor consulted on the process of evictions, options for compensation and alternative housing. Additionally, they were not provided with an adequate and reasonable notice prior to the day their homes were to be destroyed. Thousands of forcibly evicted families remained to be rehoused and/or compensated for all losses.

"Whatever the reasons given for the destruction, the authorities have clearly failed to meet their human rights obligations including those deriving from the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Côte d'Ivoire (both in 1992). All residents must be protected from forced evictions. They should be genuinely consulted and provided with adequate and reasonable notice prior to the demolitions. They should also receive prior and fair compensation for any losses and adequate alternative housing if needed," said Hervey Delmas Kokou, Executive Director of Amnesty International Côte d'Ivoire.

'More than 10 machines invaded the village without any warning or formal notice'

From 7 to 19 June 2024, Amnesty International visited four neighbourhoods affected by the demolitions: Gesco (Pays-Bas and Rivière sites), Banco 1, Boribana, destroyed in January and February 2024, and Abattoir, destroyed from 1 to 4 June 2024.

The number of people and properties affected by the demolitions is unclear as the authorities did not systematically carry out a census in every neighbourhood. 1,199 families and 203 owners in Gesco, and 600 families in Abattoir have lost their homes according to data shared by the local authorities. The number of affected people in Boribana has been estimated at 28,000 by Colombe Ivoire, a local NGO. According to a dignitary from the community chiefdom, 5,000 people were affected in Banco 1.

All people met by Amnesty International said they were not properly consulted on the conditions of the evictions nor duly notified of the day of the demolitions.

Echo Yapo, secretary general of the Banco 1 chiefdom, said: "We have been surprised on 25 February. More than 10 machines invaded the village without any warning or formal notice, without even a short note from the state... The machines destroyed everything." Aimée owns a house in Gesco, which was destroyed on 20 February: "We have not been warned. I was out and the neighbours called to tell me that they were destroying the houses. When I came back, my house had already been demolished".

Several of the residents Amnesty International met were in possession of Arrêtés de Concession Définitif (ACDs), legal documents conferring ownership of land in Côte d'Ivoire. They too have been affected by the demolitions, like Julien, the owner of a building in Gesco. "The ACD is the paper that proves this land belongs to me. But what I built on it has been demolished. Will this land still belong to me, or do they want to take it away from me?"

On 23 February, the National Council for Human Rights issued a statement denouncing the "operations carried out in disregard of fundamental rights" and "without consultation".

The right to education also violated

In addition to homes and shops, schools were also destroyed, depriving children and young people of an education, with no solution in sight.

Assita was a student in 4th grade at the Groupe Scolaire Cha-Hélène, a state-approved private school in Gesco with a student body of around 800. She has been out of education since the school was demolished on 19 February. "Our house and my school were destroyed. I was forced to go and live with my aunt in Songon, and I had to drop out of school." In the Banco 1 neighbourhood, the imam explained that a Koranic school was destroyed: "This school had over 500 students, including my children. Since we were evicted, my children haven't been to school, they've lost a year."

Some students were unable to sit their exams as planned in June. Yaya, a student in his final year at the Groupe Scolaire Cha-Hélène, said: "The conditions for preparing for the exam were challenging. As well as the school, our houses were destroyed and there were documents we couldn't save. We weren't physically or mentally ready to take the Bac [exam at the end of the secondary school]."

Waraba, a student at the Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire, has stopped her studies since the destruction at Gesco: "Our house was destroyed. My father had a stroke and can't work any more. I had to stop my studies to help my mum run a small business to support us."

Evicted children and youth must have safe and secure access to education, according to the Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development Based Evictions and Displacement.

'We are on the streets, in tears. Nothing is being done, nothing is being said'

On 13 March, the government announced the payment of 250,000 FCFA (around 372 euros) per household already evicted from two neighbourhoods, Boribana and Gesco, as well as support for landowners in acquiring plots of freehold land, the provision of plots of land according to family size, the allocation of construction aid of 1 million FCFA per family (around 1,500 euros), and the creation of a development unit for precarious neighbourhoods in the autonomous district of Abidjan, attached to the Prime Minister's Office, to monitor the evictions.

In the Gesco neighbourhood, 133 farmers saw their enclosures and fishponds demolished on 21 February. A site of almost four hectares had been granted to

them by a state-owned company, the Société de Développement des Forêts, for the creation of an agro-pastoral zone. The farmers' association estimates the losses at around 650,000,000 FCFA - around 1 million euros.

Five months after the destruction, at the time of Amnesty International's visit to the site, no compensation had been paid, according to the farmers, who deplored the lack of information provided by the authorities. Guillaume has lost all his livestock: "We went to ask the district technicians if our site will be affected, and they told us no, so we didn't think it was necessary to evacuate our animals. To our great surprise, everything was destroyed, and our cattle ran off here and there."

Konima, who had invested in fish farming, said she lost everything: "I invested nearly 10,000,000 FCFA that I had borrowed from the bank. Eight people worked for me. I'm lost in the face of everything that's happening." Since the destruction, "no authority has come to see us", said Lazare, another farmer. "From 21 February until now, I've never been to a meeting with the mayor," said Sophie, a pig farmer.

While 256 people from the Boribana neighbourhood have been rehoused in the Songon Ahiwayi commune ahead of the evictions according to the NGO Colombe Ivoire, thousands of other people declined the proposed rehousing as the relocation site was forty kilometres away. Alternative housing should be situated as close as possible to the original place of residence and source of livelihood of those evicted, according to the Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development Based Evictions and Displacement.

Aimée, who has been affected by the destruction in Gesco, said: "We've been on the streets for six months now, in tears and weeping. To this day, nothing has been done, nothing has been said. We still haven't been compensated".

The assistant to the Director General of Technical Services for the autonomous district of Abidjan told Amnesty International on 11 June that the households affected by the destruction of the Gesco neighbourhood had each received 250,000 FCFA in rehousing assistance. At the time of Amnesty International's visit, households from Abattoir were still waiting for being rehoused as announced by the authorities. People met by Amnesty International from Banco 1 said they had not received any compensation.

Violence reported during forced evictions

Excessive use of force during the destruction of the sites was reported by around twenty witnesses met by Amnesty International. "There were a lot of police cargos. The police ordered us to leave our homes. Some people resisted, but they fired tear gas and there was smoke everywhere," said a resident of Gesco. "They arrived at 11pm and stayed until 2am," said a resident of Abattoir. Assita, a student at the Groupe Scolaire Cha-Hélène, said: "The police brutalised the students who tried to intervene during the destruction of the school."

According to international law, evictions must take place during the day, with respect for dignity and safety of those affected, without resort to excessive use of force. Authorities must ensure that any use of force is strictly necessary, proportionate, and complies with international human rights standards, notably the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

On 25 July, in the Ebrié district of Adjamé, another area affected by evictions, clashes broke out between the security forces and residents, resulting in several people being injured, according to media sources.

"We call on the authorities to put an immediate end to forced evictions in Abidjan to prevent any violence and to ensure that those whose rights have been violated are provided with access to justice and effective remedies. We also call on them to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations of excessive use of force, and to bring to justice those suspected to be responsible," said Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

On 19 July 2024, Amnesty International sent a letter to the Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire, offering the opportunity to respond to the main conclusions presented in this publication. As of 5 August, no response had been received by Amnesty International.

ENDS

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