



PRESS RELEASE

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Over 13,500 People Forcibly Evicted in India During the COVID-19 Pandemic **Need for an Immediate Moratorium on Evictions**

Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) strongly condemns the continued occurrence of forced evictions across India, during the COVID-19 pandemic and harsh lockdown in the country, which has resulted in extensive loss of livelihoods and increased impoverishment of millions.

Between 16 March 2020 and 16 June 2020, HLRN has documented **at least 22 incidents of forced eviction** and home demolitions, across India, by both central and state government authorities. These incidents have affected over **13,500 persons** (conservative estimate calculated by HLRN) and resulted in the violation of multiple human rights. The reasons for these evictions include ‘beautification’ projects, government land clearance, and ‘smart city’ projects. None of these evictions can be justified during this severe global pandemic and the resulting public health and economic crisis in the country.

In most cases, due process, including provision of advance notice and alternative housing, was not followed, in violation of international human rights standards, including the United Nations (UN) [Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement](#). The vast majority of evicted persons have been rendered homeless, exposed to the heat and rain, and face the heightened risk of contracting COVID-19.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, in a [guidance note](#), urged all states to end evictions, for any reason, until the end of the pandemic and for a reasonable period of time thereafter. She stated that being evicted from one’s home during COVID-19 is a “potential death sentence.” The UN [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) also called on State parties to impose a moratorium on evictions during the pandemic. Several Indian courts, including the Bombay High Court and the Allahabad High Court, also directed state authorities not to evict people or demolish homes during the lockdown.

Despite these orders and advisories, HLRN has recorded at least 22 incidents of forced eviction across India during the national lockdown (25 March to 31 May) and after it ended (1 to 16 June). It is likely that many of these evictions were carried out during the lockdown to take advantage of the curfew-like conditions, when movement of affected persons was restricted and they did not have access to legal remedies. For instance, in Siddipet, Telangana, authorities demolished 30 homes of Dalit farmers in the middle of the night, without prior notice. In Odisha, the Kalahandi forest department forcibly demolished homes and destroyed belongings of 32 *adivasi*/Kondh tribal families in Sagada Village, also without notice. In Manipur’s Macheng Village, forest officials with the help of the police, evicted families of the Rongmei Naga tribe, early in the morning, on grounds that they were “encroaching” on forest land. Villagers who protested the drive were dispersed by the police, reportedly, with force involving the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. In Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, local authorities demolished 20 houses for the ‘beautification’ of a pond, rendering daily-wage labourers homeless during the lockdown.

In June, forest officials in Siwal, Madhya Pradesh set fire to the house of an *adivasi* family and threatened to destroy more homes, reportedly, to prevent villagers from cultivating land. In Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, the state administration evicted about 400 families living in government housing to accommodate those evicted from 160 houses for the ‘beautification’ of the Arpa River. Despite the rise in COVID-19 cases, families have been forced to live out on the streets without food and water. Most recently, in Shakur Basti, Delhi, officials of the Indian Railways forced 13 families to demolish their own houses after threatening to evict them.

Additionally, during the lockdown, thousands of people living in homelessness in several cities, including Mumbai and Delhi, were evicted from their habitual sites of residence or forcibly taken to temporary shelters.

For instance, members of the Pardhi community, who had been living under Mumbai's Western Express Highway flyover for decades, were forcibly removed from the area, after the national lockdown was declared.

According to the United Nations, forced evictions are a gross violation of human rights. During a pandemic, to evict people when they are required to 'stay at home,' is particularly inhumane and amplifies their already high vulnerability to contracting the virus. The urban and rural poor across India have been suffering disproportionately from lockdown-induced hardships related to the loss of livelihoods, income, and food. Demolishing their homes under such circumstances, has exacerbated their plight and resulted in multiple human rights violations, including of their rights to life, health, adequate housing, food, water, and sanitation.

Documented Sites of Forced Eviction and Reason for Eviction (16 March to 16 June 2020)

SITE OF EVICTION	REASON FOR EVICTION
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh	River 'beautification' and 'smart city' project
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu	'Smart city' project for restoration of water bodies
Erode, Tamil Nadu	Land clearance along a canal for a 'smart city' project
Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh	Removal of 'encroachments'
Hubballi, Karnataka	Road widening
Jaipur, Rajasthan	Road construction
Kalahandi, Odisha	Forest clearance
Macheng Village, Manipur	Forest clearance
Mumbai, Maharashtra	Removal of 'encroachments'
Kishtwar, Pulwama, and Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir	Removal of 'illegal constructions'
Rewa, Madhya Pradesh	'Beautification' of a pond
Siwal, Madhya Pradesh	Village land clearance
Delhi	Railway land clearance
Siddipet, Telangana	Reservoir project
Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir	Dal Lake restoration project

Given the precarious living conditions of the urban and rural poor and their heightened risk of infection, including their inability to practice physical distancing and wash hands frequently, HLRN had called on the Government of India on 13 March via a [press release](#) and on 18 March via a letter to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to impose a national moratorium on forced evictions and ensure that no one in the country is rendered homeless. We had also called for measures to improve living conditions of those who are homeless and inadequately housed. The Ministry took heed of HLRN's letter by forwarding it to all state governments (on 29 April 2020) and asking them to frame policies to protect those without adequate housing. Despite this, both state and central government authorities, such as the Indian Railways, have committed grave violations of human rights by demolishing homes of the urban and rural poor at the height of the pandemic, thereby threatening their lives and worsening the risk of exposure and spread of the coronavirus.

Given this alarming national situation, HLRN calls on the state, at all levels, to immediately:

1. Impose a **national moratorium on evictions, for any reason, until 31 December 2020**. This should include a moratorium on rental evictions of people who are unable to pay rent on account of lockdown-related livelihood losses. Rental vouchers should be provided to low-income families to enable them to pay rent arrears, thereby also protecting low-income persons whose livelihood depends on rental income.
2. Provide **compensation for loss of housing** and personal belongings, and support evicted families to rebuild their homes at the same site, or provide **adequate alternative housing** nearby, within a vicinity of two kilometres.
3. **Investigate all acts of forced eviction** that have taken place during the pandemic, according to the law.
4. Ensure the provision of **adequate services**, including water, sanitation, and access to food and livelihood sources to the urban and rural poor.
5. Uphold the human right to adequate housing of all and recognize its importance to health. Develop solutions to **provide adequate housing** to homeless and other inadequately-housed persons, along a continuum, focusing on the 'Housing First' model that prioritizes provision of homes to the homeless.

For more information, please contact: 9818205234 / 9831943885

Housing and Land Rights Network

G-18/1 Nizamuddin West, New Delhi – 110013, India
+91-11-4054-1680 | contact@hlrn.org.in | www.hlrn.org.in