



PRESS RELEASE

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Over 54,000 People in India Forcibly Evicted During the COVID-19 Pandemic (15 March to 31 October 2020)

Urgent Call for a National Moratorium on Evictions

Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) is deeply concerned about the continuing rise in forced evictions and demolitions of homes of the urban and rural poor across India, despite the grave public health emergency resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. Housing has been recognized globally as the ‘[frontline defence](#)’ against this life-threatening disease. The World Health Organization and India’s Ministry of Health and Family Welfare advocate staying at home as the best means of protection from COVID-19. India has recorded almost 9 million COVID-19 cases to date. During this acute crisis, the state’s persistent destruction of housing of the poor constitutes a direct assault on their human rights to health and life.

Between 15 March 2020 and 31 October 2020, HLRN has documented **at least 83 incidents of forced eviction and home demolition** by central and state government authorities in 22 states and Union Territories across urban and rural India.¹ These evictions have affected **over 54,000 people**² and resulted in multiple human rights violations. The vast majority of affected persons were not provided prior notice or resettlement. They have been rendered homeless and face heightened exposure to the coronavirus as well as the cold weather and air pollution, which compounds their health risks. Reasons for the documented evictions include construction and infrastructure projects, government and forest land clearance, ‘beautification’ projects, and implementation of court orders. Regardless of the rationale provided, evictions cannot be justified during this severe pandemic. Some of these incidents, between 1 August and 31 October 2020, are mentioned below.³

In Bihar’s Kaimur District, the state forest department evicted several Adivasi/Indigenous/tribal families from their lands under the guise of afforestation projects, and allegedly, also for the creation of a tiger reserve in the area. For instance, in Sarainar Village, the forest department demolished 50 Adivasi homes in September. Reports indicate that several people protesting the eviction suffered injuries when police fired in the air, while 20 persons were arbitrarily arrested on false charges. In Dugli Village, Chhattisgarh, the local administration, reportedly, not only forcibly evicted 20 Adivasi families in October but also set their houses on fire, damaged their crops, and used force against them to vacate forestland that they had been living on for the last 27 years. Also in Chhattisgarh, authorities evicted 50 tribal families in Korba District from forestland where they had lived for generations, allegedly for the construction of a ‘cow shelter.’

Several incidents of forced eviction without due process have been reported in Delhi – the city with the highest number of COVID-19 cases in India today. For instance, in August, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation demolished 40 houses in Bhatt Camp, Badarpur. In September, the Indian Railways destroyed 10 homes in Lawrence Road and 6 homes in Mansarovar Park. Also in September, the Delhi Development Authority razed over 100 houses in Jamia Nagar, reportedly to comply with an order of the National Green Tribunal to remove “encroachments” along the Yamuna River, while in October, it bulldozed 150 houses behind Akshardham Temple; 350 families in the settlement live in fear of an impending eviction. At the onset of winter, the forest department evicted 150 families in Rangpuri Pahadi, leaving them out in the cold without any shelter.

¹ These include: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and NCR, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

² This is a conservative estimate calculated by HLRN, based on cases known to us. We have received reports of several more incidents of eviction/demolition, but these are not included here, as we have not been able to verify that data.

³ See HLRN’s previous press releases on evictions during the pandemic, between 15 March and 31 July 2020:

- 13 June 2020: https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Press_Release_Evictions_COVID19_June_2020.pdf
- 18 August 2020: https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Press_Release_Forced_Evictions_2019.pdf

In September, the Uttar Pradesh government razed 300 houses in Bhopura, 110 houses in Sihani, and 300 houses in Defence Colony, Ghaziabad. Between 30 September and 20 October, the Ghaziabad Development Authority conducted three eviction drives in Bhovapur that resulted in the demolition of 250 homes. Affected persons, including 15 pregnant and lactating women and newborn babies, were rendered homeless and forced to live in the open. A Public Interest Litigation filed by HLRN in the Allahabad High Court resulted in a positive order directing authorities to provide alternative housing, medical facilities, essential services, and compensation to affected families.

In an “encroachment-removal” drive, the Municipal Corporation of Faridabad demolished over 1,200 houses in Lakkadpur Khor Village in September, rendering about 5,000 people homeless. Between July and August 2020, authorities destroyed about 3,500 houses in several locations in Gurugram’s Sikanderpur area, for the creation of a biodiversity park. Affected families are out on the streets seeking rehabilitation. In Manipur’s Lamphel Sanakeithel, state authorities demolished 200 houses in September to remove “encroachments” on government land, even though some of the families had land-ownership documents. A project to restore water bodies in Chennai led to the eviction of 90 families living along Alapakkam Lake in August, while in Hyderabad, about 119 families were evicted from under Shivaji Bridge, for the second time in the past year, for flood-mitigation measures. In Mumbai, over 60 families living near Amar Mahal Junction in Chembur lost their homes for a road-widening project in October. Only some of them were resettled in Tilak Nagar.

All reported evictions have not complied with international human rights standards and guidelines, including the United Nations (UN) [Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement](#). The [former](#) and [current](#) UN Special Rapporteurs on Adequate Housing have urged states to ban evictions, for any reason, until the end of the pandemic and for a reasonable period of time thereafter, as being evicted from one’s home during COVID-19 is a “potential death sentence.” The UN [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) has also called on State parties to impose a moratorium on evictions.

During the pandemic-related lockdown, several Indian courts directed authorities not to demolish homes or evict people on account of their limited access to judicial remedy. While some of these orders were in effect only for the duration of the lockdown, several were subsequently extended as a result of the worsening coronavirus crisis. For instance, the High Court of Bombay extended its stay on demolitions till 22 December 2020, the Allahabad High Court till 1 December 2020, and the Orissa High Court until 25 November 2020. Despite these orders, forced evictions and demolitions of homes of the poor have continued unabated.

It is likely that many of these evictions are being carried out during this period to take advantage of restrictions on freedom of assembly and movement, and the limited ability of affected persons to protest and access justice. The urban and rural poor across India are already suffering disproportionately from the pandemic-induced economic crisis and loss of livelihoods. To destroy their homes and personal belongings, thereby increasing their impoverishment and amplifying their risks to the coronavirus, is highly condemnable.

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, at least until June 2021**. This should include a moratorium on rental evictions of those who are unable to pay rent on account of livelihood loss. 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 families to rebuild their homes at the same site, or provide **adequate alternative housing** 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. **Comply with the UN Eviction Guidelines**, including by providing security of tenure to all those currently threatened with eviction across the country.
5. Ensure **adequate services**, including water, sanitation, and access to food and livelihood sources.
6. **Uphold the human right to adequate housing** of all and recognize its critical importance to health and life. Develop solutions to **provide adequate housing** with tenure security to homeless and other inadequately-housed persons, along a continuum, focusing on the ‘Housing First’ model that prioritizes provision of secure homes to those living in homelessness.

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