

Joint Public Statement: On Behalf of Displaced Communities

November 22, 2014, Cambridge, Massachusetts

We are a group of researchers and academics, representatives of human rights organizations and networks, grassroots leaders and independent experts, who have come together in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on November 21-22* to participate in a collective reflection regarding strategies against evictions and displacement carried out in the name of 'development.'

We wish to express our grave collective concern regarding the ongoing threats and serious human rights violations that are being experienced by communities directly affected by development-based evictions and displacement, and to highlight a few emblematic cases and situations around the world.

We stand in solidarity with the approximately 22,000 people living in Orissa, India, and 20,000 tribal people living in Khandahar, who have organized to resist being displaced from their lands and livelihoods to make way for the POSCO steel project, the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment in India today. We call on the Government of India to fully respect the human rights of the people living in the project-affected area, including the right to food, health, housing and education as well as freedom of expression and movement. We urge the POSCO Corporation, POSCO's investors and the company's home state, the Republic of Korea, to abide by its internationally-recognized responsibilities to ensure that its operations do not contribute to the abuse of human rights.

In South Africa, community organizers and leaders of the shack-dweller movement,

Abahlali baseMjondolo, have been targeted in order to silence their demands for protection against forced eviction and dignified treatment for the urban poor. We condemn the recent assassination of Thuli Ndlovu, a 36-year old grassroots leader, who was fatally shot in her home on 29 September, 2014, apparently in reprisal for her work to promote the right to adequate housing in the informal settlements of Durban; as well as, last year, the assassination of several shack-dweller leaders who were organizing to resist forcible evictions. We call on the Government of South Africa to launch a full and impartial investigation to clarify the perpetrators of these crimes and ensure that they are brought to justice; to provide protection for community leaders that work to defend the rights of people threatened with forced evictions; and to take all possible steps to guarantee the right to adequate housing and dignity for all residents in South Africa's informal settlements.

With over 5 million people who have been displaced since 1985, a disproportionate number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Colombia are indigenous or of African descent. Despite the tremendous obstacles faced by Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples due to historic marginalization and racial discrimination, they continue to be subjected to serious threats and abuses. Hundreds of IDP representatives have reported receiving death threats and the ongoing risk of displacement continues to affect their lives, even during the current peace process, while the land restitution program currently being implemented in

Colombia is facilitating land grabs by corporate and elite interests. We call on the Government of Colombia to ensure protection for IDPs, including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, and to take all possible steps to ensure that land transfers benefit the individuals and communities that depend most on access to land in order to live in dignity. We also call on all parties to the armed conflict to agree to a bilateral ceasefire in order to enable the country's displaced people to realize their human rights and live a life of dignity.

Finally, we deplore the recent displacement of 700 vulnerable people in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, caused by the abrupt shutdown of shelters and programs on Long Island, MA, which separated the inhabitants of Long Island from their possessions, including medications, identity paper and clothing, and has sent countless individuals onto the streets in Boston. We call on the Government of the United States, as well as the governments of Boston and of Massachusetts, to immediately ensure that the displaced people have access

to dignified housing and required services, and to provide protection from future eviction threats.

We recall that forced evictions are, unless exceptional circumstances are in place, *prima facie* incompatible with the requirements of international human rights standards, and that the governments of the world bear obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. We also call on the financial institutions, banks and investors that fund and profit from the projects that are causing forcible displacement and evictions to exert their influence in order to ensure that these projects do not result in human rights violations or push people into poverty or extreme poverty. Finally, we affirm that the legitimate quest for development should never serve as a justification for human rights violations or the impoverishment and dispossession of vulnerable communities, and that real development should enhance the ability of all people to realize their rights and live a life of dignity.

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