

URGENT APPEAL

Islamabad (Pakistan): Informal Settlement Facing Demolition, Eviction, and Police Brutality

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Islamabad I-11 Katchi Abadi (informal settlement) Facing Demolition, Eviction, and Police Brutality

On July 30, 2015, several hundred heavily armed members of the Islamabad Police and the paramilitary force, Rangers, were deployed to demolish the I-11 Katchi Abadi (informal settlement) in Islamabad in a large-scale evacuation operation headed by the municipal government department, the Capital Development Authority (CDA). The police and paramilitary used excessive and brutal force, using tear gas, rubber bullets, and baton charges against the unarmed residents and nonviolent activists.

200 plus homes were destroyed, and activists on the ground have reported that some homes were demolished while people were inside the structures. Reports have also come in about the death of a newborn due to these operations.

Over 60 people have been arrested and there are reports of 1300 abadi residents being charged under anti-terrorism legislation.

The operations are expected to continue, with more demolitions and evictions tomorrow and days to come. The 15,000 or so residents of I-11 abadi face this immediate peril and threat to their lives, homes, and existence.

This is an urgent action appeal for the complete and immediate halt to this blatant exercise of state violence and to prevent human rights abuse. A great tragedy is already in the making, and we appeal that every action be taken to prevent this.

Background

This brutal episode of police brutality, state violence, and illegal action against the residents of I-11 abadi is part of an ongoing efforts by the CDA, backed by the Government of Pakistan, and with support of the Islamabad High Court, to remove the so-called “illegal” settlements of Islamabad. A detailed background note to the issue and responses to the government’s charges and position are given in this press packet. Here, in summary we point out some key points.

First, the government has violated its own laws and policies, including article 38-D of the constitution that makes it the State’s responsibility to provide adequate housing, the National Housing Policy and the National Policy on Katchi Abadis, Urban Renewal and Slum-Upgradation (2001). These policies clearly state that evictions without resettlement plans are not allowed. In the past weeks, I-11 residents and activists have reached out to the state but have been shut out completely. In addition, in the days leading to the demolitions, dozens of residents have been

arrested without warrant as an intimidation strategy.

Second, the government officials claim that the abadi harbors criminals, drug traffickers, and terrorists. This is the case of wholesale demonization of over 15,000 or more residents of the I-11 abadi. The residents of abadi are the urban poor who work mostly the informal sectors of the economy, as wage-laborers, domestic help, street vendors, cleaners, and do other forms of precarious work. This is a serious case of meting out collective punishment to the urban poor.

Third, the label of “terrorism” is loaded with ethnic connotations in the context of “war on terror” and in the specific context of ethnic politics in Pakistan. The vast majority of the abadi residents are ethnic Pushtun, some from the tribal areas of Pakistan where low and high-intensity conflict has been going on for the past three and a half decades. The sitting government has announced the regularization of several abadis in the nearby cities, where different ethnic groups live, but has systematically tried to demonise and target the ethnic Pushtun groups. This is a clear case of discrimination, systematic demonization, and targeting of a group based on their ethnicity.

Fourth, many of the abadi residents have lived here for over three decades and are registered as voters and have National Identification Cards. But the government has used the title of “Afghans” to claim that these are non-citizens. These allegations are false and against the records of UN and government surveys. Only a small percentage of the residents of I-11 are Afghan nationals.

Finally, the CDA announced that after the evictions, the residents will be loaded into trucks and sent “back to where they came from”. For most of the residents, this means being shipped back to the war-torn tribal areas where the military has launched major operations which has resulted in large scale internal displacement and an IDP crisis. The plan to “send back” I-11 residents who are born in the abadi is outrageous, and if it is executed, will be further putting the citizens in harm’s way.

We appeal that all measures be taken to halt the operations and police brutality immediately, release all people arrested absolving them of any charges, and steps be taken as per local, national, and international law, and in consideration with the basic, political, and human rights of the residents of the slum. We urge you to contact the following officials from the Government of Pakistan, Supreme Court, and CDA.

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On behalf of:

Residents of I-11 Abadi, members of All Pakistan Alliance for Katchi Abadis (APAKA), political activists, and concerned citizens.

More Information:

Press Packet

http://issuu.com/awamiworkers/docs/press_pack_on_kachi_abadis_2015/3?e=13735513/14334097

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