



The Chronicle

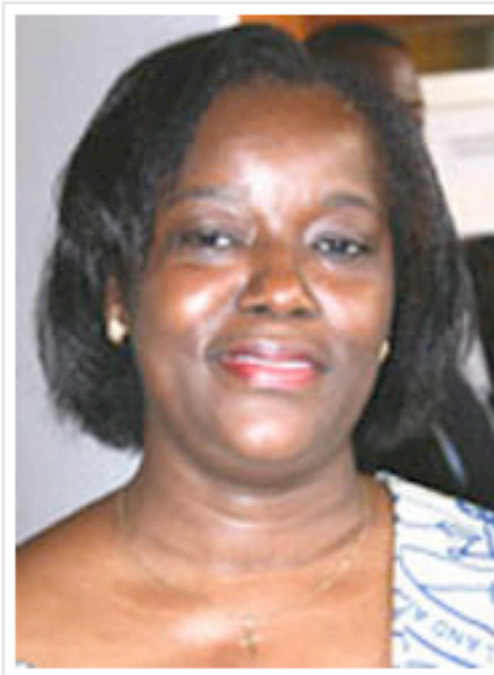
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Forced evictions dent Ghana's Human Rights image

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In spite of Ghana's democratic credentials and respect for human rights on the African continent, the 2011 State of the World's Human Rights report catalogued a number of worrying abuses of the rights of the citizens of this country.

According to the report, thousands of Ghanaians were forcibly evicted from their homes in disputes with landlords.

The report, which was launched by Amnesty International, a global human rights organisation, over the weekend, indicated that the evictions were carried out without adequate prior consultation and notice. In most cases, no

compensations were paid, neither were there alternative accommodation.

In May, up to 2,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes in 'Abinkyi slum', in Kumasi, the report highlighted. Residents were given just two weeks notice, and were not offered any alternative accommodation or compensation.

Then in July, scores of people were forcibly evicted from their homes in 'Abuja slum' in Accra. Residents were informed about the demolition only two days before, and were not offered any compensation or alternative accommodation.

The report, which was launched simultaneously, in Ghana and across several countries worldwide, further revealed that thousands of Ghanaians remain under threat of forced eviction in the course of the year.

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"Threats to freedom of expression grew. Thousands of people were forcibly evicted, and thousands remained under threat of forced eviction. The criminal justice system remained slow, and prisons were overcrowded and poorly resourced. Violence against women continued to be pervasive," the report stressed.

Going further, the London-based human rights organisation stated that in February, March and April, intra-communal violence in the Bunkpurugu/Yunyoo District of the Northern Region left at least five people dead, and over 300 houses burnt.

Thousands of people fled their homes, some crossing into Togo. At least, five people were killed and several houses burned down in May, in renewed inter-communal violence in Bawku, in the Upper East Region.

According to the report, the violence prevented local residents from carrying out normal farming and trading activities, resulting in food shortages that left approximately 2,000 families in need of food aid.

The report raised an alarm about threats to freedom of expression. At least six people were arrested, detained, or prosecuted for "causing fear and panic."

According to Amnesty International, in October, Amina Mohammad was arrested after saying on a local radio station in Tema that there had been an armed robbery and rape on a bus.

She was charged with "causing fear and panic", denied bail by the Accra Circuit Court and remanded in police custody. She was eventually granted bail by a Human Rights Court in Accra in November, and her case was adjourned until 2011, the report noted.

In October, approximately 19 homes and businesses in Nankpanduri village in the Northern Region were burned down by military and police officers. Several people were injured when they were shot or beaten by security personnel who were searching for an escaped prisoner who was alleged to have killed two police officers.

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According to the report, 17 people who were involved in various murder cases were sentenced to death by hanging, but "no executions were carried out."

The report also talked about the justice system in the country. It noted that access to legal aid was inadequate, a situation, it said, lead to some prisoners spending over ten years, whilst awaiting trial. It said the prisons were overcrowded and under-resourced, although the "proportion of remand prisoners began to fall."

The police and other security forces were fingered for going above the law, by regularly detaining individuals in police custody for longer than allowed by law.

According to the report, the Police Service, in the year under review, did too little to improve on the wellbeing of detainees. In February 2010, for instance, the report stated that two people died in an Ashaiman police cell, whilst 52 people were being held in a cell meant for 20 people.

Another chilling revelation by the report is how the police had failed to investigate the Tema shooting incident, where combined troops of the military and police used live and rubber bullets and tear gas against people protesting against the demolition of their businesses.