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**United Nations  
Comprehensive Human Rights  
Guidelines on Development-Based  
Displacement (1997)**

# **The Practice of Forced Evictions: United Nations Comprehensive Human Rights Guidelines on Development-Based Displacement**

**ADOPTED BY THE EXPERT SEMINAR ON THE PRACTICE OF FORCED EVICTIONS**

Geneva, Switzerland

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## **PREAMBLE**

*Recalling* the human rights standards established pursuant to the International Bill of Human Rights,

*Whereas* many international treaties, resolutions, decisions, general comments, judgments and other texts have recognized and reaffirmed that forced evictions constitute violations of a wide range of internationally recognized human rights,

*Recalling* Economic and Social Council decision 1996/290, Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1993/77, and Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities resolution 1996/27,

*Reaffirming* that under international law every State has the obligation to respect and ensure respect for human rights and humanitarian law, including obligations to prevent violations, to investigate violations, to take appropriate action against violators, and to afford remedies and reparation to victims,

*Reaffirming* that development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom,

*Whereas* the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action stipulated that while development facilitates the enjoyment of all human rights, the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgment of internationally recognized human rights,

*Recognizing* the widespread nature of the practice of forced evictions and that when forced evictions are carried out this can occur in a variety of contexts including but not limited to conflicts over land rights, development and infrastructure projects, such as the construction of dams or other large-scale energy projects, land acquisition measures associated with urban renewal, housing renovation, city beautification programmes, the clearing of land for agricultural purposes or macro-urban projects, unbridled speculation in land, and the holding of major international events such as the Olympic Games,

*Conscious that* forced evictions intensify social conflict and inequality and invariably affect the poorest, most socially, economically, and vulnerable sectors of society, specifically women, children, and indigenous peoples,

*Conscious also* of guidelines developed by international financial and other institutions on involuntary displacement and resettlement,

*Resolved* to protect human rights and prevent violations due to the practice of forced evictions,

## **SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND ISSUES**

### **Scope and Nature of the Guidelines**

1. The present Guidelines address the human rights implications of the practice of forced evictions associated with development-based displacement in urban and rural areas. The Guidelines reflect and are consistent with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and should be subject to the widest possible application.
2. Having due regard to all relevant definitions of the practice of forced evictions under international human rights provisions and instruments, the present Guidelines apply to instances of forced evictions in which there are acts and/or omissions involving the coerced and involuntary removal of individuals, groups and communities from their homes and/or lands and common property resources they occupy or are dependent upon, thus eliminating or limiting the possibility of an individual, group or community residing or working in a particular dwelling, residence or place.
3. While there are many similarities between the practice of forced evictions and internal displacement, population transfer, mass expulsions, mass exodus, ethnic cleansing and other practices involving the coerced and involuntary movement of people from their homes, lands and communities, forced evictions constitute a distinct practice under international law. Persons, groups and communities subjected to or threatened with forced evictions form, therefore, a distinct group under international human rights law.
4. Forced evictions constitute prima facie violations of a wide range of internationally recognized human rights and can only be carried out under exceptional circumstances and in full accordance with the present Guidelines and relevant provisions of international human rights law.

## **SECTION TWO: GENERAL OBLIGATIONS**

5. While forced evictions can be carried out, sanctioned, demanded, proposed, initiated or tolerated by a variety of distinct actors, responsibility for forced evictions under international law, ultimately, is held by States. This does not, however, relieve other entities from obligations in this regard, in particular occupying powers, international financial and other institutions or organisations, transnational corporations and individual third parties, including public and private landlords or land owners.
6. States should apply appropriate civil or criminal penalties against any person or entity, within its jurisdiction, whether public or private, who carries out any forced evictions, not in full conformity with applicable law and the present Guidelines.
7. States should object, through the appropriate international legal mechanisms, to the carrying out of forced evictions in other States when such forced evictions are not in full conformity with the present Guidelines and relevant provisions of international human rights law.
8. States should ensure that international organisations in which they are represented refrain from sponsoring or implementing any project, programme or policy which may involve the carrying out of forced evictions not in full conformity with international law and the present Guidelines.

## **SECTION THREE: SPECIFIC PREVENTATIVE OBLIGATIONS**

### **The Obligation of Maximum Effective Protection**

9. States should secure by all appropriate means, including the provision of security of tenure, the maximum degree of effective protection against the practice of forced evictions for all persons under their jurisdiction. In this regard, special consideration should be given to the rights of indigenous peoples, children and women, particularly female-headed households and other vulnerable groups. These obligations are of an immediate nature and are not qualified by resource-related considerations.

10. States should refrain from introducing any deliberately retrogressive measures with respect to de jure or de facto protection against forced evictions.

11. States should ensure that adequate and effective legal or other appropriate remedies are available to any persons claiming that his/her right of protection against forced evictions has been violated or is under threat of violation.

12. States should ensure that eviction impact assessments are carried out prior to the initiation of any project which could result in development-based displacement, with a view to fully securing the human rights of all potentially affected persons, groups and communities.

### **The Obligation to Prevent Homelessness**

13. States should ensure that no persons, groups or communities are rendered homeless or are exposed to the violation of any other human rights as a consequence of a forced eviction.

### **The Obligation to Adopt Appropriate Measures of Law and Policy**

14. States should carry out comprehensive reviews of relevant national legislation with a view to ensuring the compatibility of such legislation with the norms contained in the present Guidelines and other relevant international human rights provisions. In this regard, special measures shall be taken to ensure that no forms of discrimination, statutory or otherwise, are applied in relation to property rights, housing rights and access to resources.

15. States should adopt appropriate legislation and policies to ensure the protection of individuals, groups and communities from forced eviction, having due regard to their best interests. States are encouraged to adopt constitutional provisions in this regard.

### **The Obligation to Explore All Possible Alternatives**

16. States should fully explore all possible alternatives to any act involving forced eviction. In this regard, all affected persons, including women, children and indigenous peoples shall have the right to all relevant information and the right to full participation and consultation throughout the entire process and to propose any alternatives. In the event that agreement cannot be reached on the proposed alternative by the affected persons, groups and communities and the entity proposing the forced eviction in question, an independent body, such as a court of law, tribunal, or ombudsman may be called upon.

### **The Obligation to Expropriate Only as a Last Resort**

17. States should refrain, to the maximum possible extent, from compulsorily acquiring housing or land, unless such acts are legitimate and necessary and designed to facilitate the enjoyment of human rights through, for instance, measures of land reform or redistribution. If, as a last resort, States consider themselves compelled to undertake proceedings of expropriation or compulsory

acquisition, such action shall be: (a) determined and envisaged by law and norms regarding forced eviction, in so far as these are consistent internationally recognized human rights; (b) solely for the purpose of protecting the general welfare in a democratic society; (c) reasonable and proportional and (d) in accordance with the present Guidelines.

## **SECTION FOUR: THE RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS**

### **Integrity of the Home**

18. All persons have the right to adequate housing which includes, inter alia, the integrity of the home and access to and protection of common property resources. The home and its occupants shall be protected against any acts of violence, threats of violence or other forms of harassment, in particular as they relate to women and children. The home and its occupants shall further be protected against any arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy or respect of the home.

### **Assurances of Security of Tenure**

19. All persons have a right to security of tenure which provides sufficient legal protection from forced eviction from one's home or land.

20. The present Guidelines shall apply to all persons, groups and communities irrespective of their tenure status.

## **SECTION FIVE: LEGAL REMEDIES**

21. All persons threatened with forced eviction, notwithstanding the rationale or legal basis thereof, have the right to:

- (a) a fair hearing before a competent, impartial and independent court or tribunal
- (b) legal counsel, and where necessary, sufficient legal aid
- (c) effective remedies

22. States should adopt legislative measures prohibiting any forced evictions without a court order. The court shall consider all relevant circumstances of affected persons, groups and communities and any decision be in full accordance with principles of equality and justice and internationally recognized human rights.

23. All persons have a right to appeal any judicial or other decisions affecting their rights as established pursuant to the present Guidelines, to the highest national judicial authority.  
Compensation

24. All persons subjected to any forced eviction not in full accordance with the present Guidelines, should have a right to compensation for any losses of land, personal, real or other property or goods, including rights or interests in property not recognized in national legislation, incurred in connection with a forced eviction. Compensation should include land and access to common property resources and should not be restricted to cash payments.

### **Restitution and Return**

25. All persons, groups and communities subjected to forced evictions have the right to, but shall not be forced to return to their homes, lands or places of origin.

## Resettlements

26. In full cognizance of the contents of the present Guidelines there may be instances in which, in the public interest, or where the safety, health or enjoyment of human rights so demands, particular persons, groups and communities may be subject to resettlement. Such resettlement must occur in a just and equitable manner and in full accordance with law of general application.

27. All persons, groups and communities have the right to suitable resettlement which includes the right to alternative land or housing, which is safe, secure, accessible, affordable and habitable.

28. In determining the compatibility of resettlement with the present Guidelines, States should ensure that in the context of any case of resettlement the following criteria are adhered to:

(a) No resettlement shall take place until such a time that a full resettlement policy consistent with the present Guidelines and internationally recognized human rights is in place.

(b) Resettlement must ensure equal rights to women, children and indigenous populations and other vulnerable groups including the right to property ownership and access to resources. Resettlement policies should include programmes designed for women with respect to education, health, family welfare and employment opportunities.

(c) The actor proposing and/or carrying out the resettlement shall be required by law to pay for any costs associated therewith, including all resettlement costs.

(d) No affected persons, groups or communities, shall suffer detriment as far as their human rights are concerned nor shall their right to the continuous improvement of living conditions be subject to infringement. This applies equally to host communities at resettlement sites, and affected persons, groups and communities subjected to forced eviction.

(e) That affected persons, groups and communities provide their full and informed consent as regards the relocation site. The State shall provide all necessary amenities and services and economic opportunities.

(f) Sufficient information shall be provided to affected persons, groups and communities concerning all State projects as well as to the planning and implementation processes relating to the resettlement concerned, including information concerning the purpose to which the eviction dwelling or site is to be put and the persons, groups or communities who will benefit from the evicted site. Particular attention must be given to ensure that indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, the landless, women and children are represented and included in this process.

(g) The entire resettlement process should be carried out in full consultation and participation with the affected persons, groups and communities. States should take into account in particular all alternate plans proposed by the affected persons, groups and communities.

(h) If after a full and fair public hearing, it is found that there is a need to proceed with the resettlement, then the affected persons, groups and communities shall be given at least ninety (90) days notice prior to the date of the resettlement; and

(i) Local government officials and neutral observers, properly identified, shall be present during the resettlement so as to ensure that no force, violence or intimidation is involved.

## **SECTION SIX: MONITORING**

29. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations human rights institutions should seek by all possible means to secure full compliance with the present Guidelines.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SAVINGS**

### **Savings Clause**

30. The provisions contained within the present Guidelines are without prejudice to the provisions of any other international instrument or national law which ensures the enjoyment of all human rights as they relate to the practice of forced evictions.