

URGENT ACTION

HUNDREDS OF FAMILIES FACING FORCED EVICTIONS

Despite numerous complaints from residents the authorities are proceeding with a mass demolition project, and scores of families in the north of Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, are facing forced evictions.

Hundreds of families are facing forced evictions in and near northern Ashgabat with the Choganly neighbourhood being among the worst affected. Throughout March and April, the residents were told by officials to either demolish their houses themselves or they would be demolished by the authorities. The authorities claimed that as some houses were intended as holiday homes (*dachas*) and other houses were built illegally, owners or occupiers are not entitled to compensation or alternative accommodation or land.

According to media reports, many families affected by the forced evictions were using the houses as their main or only place of residence. Some of the affected families had been evicted in previous waves of urban development and were given empty plots of land and plastic tents in Choganly. They built new houses and used the plots for cultivation of crops. Others were renting the houses, among the cheapest in Ashgabat, after moving from other provinces in search of employment opportunities. The estimated number of houses affected by the current demolition plans range from 13,000 to 18,000.

According to Alternative Turkmenistan News, half of the houses in the designated areas have already been demolished in recent weeks. Experts on Turkmenistan have linked the current forced evictions to the construction of facilities for the forthcoming Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in 2017 and an ongoing city development project which aims at replacing houses with modern apartment blocks.

These house demolitions fall short of international human rights standards on evictions. Residents in affected areas were not given adequate advance notice or consulted about alternatives to the eviction, and they were not provided with any alternative accommodation. A Vienna-based non-governmental organization Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, reported that those complaining about the eviction are being harassed and intimidated by the authorities.

Turkmenistan is party to several international human rights instruments including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which require the state to prevent and refrain from forced evictions.

Please write immediately in Turkmen, Russian, English or your own language:

- Calling on the president to halt forced evictions of residents of Choganly and other areas around Ashgabat;
- Urging him to ensure that those forcibly evicted are provided with effective remedies including alternative housing as a matter of urgency;
- Urging him to ensure that all evictions are carried out only as a last resort and only in strict compliance with international human rights standards;
- Calling on them to ensure that those objecting to the evictions can express their position without being subjected to intimidation, threats and harassment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 APRIL 2015 TO:

President of Turkmenistan
Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov
Presidential Palace
744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Fax: +993 (12) 93 51 12 (please
continue to try between 10-1500 GMT)
Salutation: Dear President

And copies to:
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Rashid Meredov
Archabil av. 108
744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Email: info@mfa.gov.tm
Fax: +993 (12) 44-58 12 (please
continue to try between 10-1500 GMT)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Fax Email Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Turkmenistan's record on human rights is extremely poor, marked by the systematic state harassment of dissenting figures, journalists and human rights defenders, persistent reports of torture and other ill-treatment by security forces of people in detention, and the widespread denial of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Turkmenistani authorities have been extremely successful in preventing reports about human rights violations from reaching the international community. The information available on real living conditions inside the country is extremely limited. Independent observers are barred from the country, and information from inside is brutally suppressed. There is no genuine opposition political party, no independent media and not a single independent human rights organization operating freely inside Turkmenistan. Internal dissent is brutally suppressed, and the climate of fear extends far beyond Turkmenistan's borders. For more details, see Amnesty International's report *Turkmenistan: An "Era of Happiness" or more of the same repression?* available at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur61/005/2013/en/

Name: Families facing forced evictions

Gender m/f: both