

## COHRE 2006 HOUSING RIGHTS AWARDS – Fact Sheets

### 2006 HOUSING RIGHTS VIOLATORS:

#### Nigeria, the Philippines and Greece

COHRE's annual **Housing Rights Violator Awards** are presented to governments and other public institutions found to have committed persistent and unjustifiable housing rights violations during the preceding year, in clear contravention of international human rights law and related standards. The **Housing Rights Violator Awards** are designed to draw attention to some of the world's worst housing rights abuses.

The recipients of the **2006 Housing Rights Violator Awards** – the governments of Nigeria, the Philippines and Greece – are responsible for particularly egregious and pervasive housing rights violations over the past year. Although many countries fail to take their housing rights obligations seriously, COHRE has chosen these three Governments to highlight their particular disregard for the housing rights of those living within their borders.

Several international treaties, conventions and other standards, including the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, recognise the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right, to which all persons are entitled.

Despite widespread recognition of the right to adequate housing in international law, violations of the right continue to occur on a massive scale worldwide. Over one billion people live in inadequate housing and a further 100 million are homeless on any given night. Forced evictions render millions more homeless each year. The victims of eviction are almost always poor, and the impact on their lives is highly traumatic.

COHRE has two key aims in presenting its **Housing Rights Violator Awards**: to raise awareness of the human right to housing and the nature and scale of violations of this right, particularly in the awarded countries; and to engage award recipients in a constructive dialogue with COHRE and other civil society groups to ensure housing rights violations are addressed and the right to housing is in future respected, protected and fulfilled.

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## **THE PHILIPPINES: Housing Rights Fact Sheet**

The Philippines continues to evict hundreds of thousands of people in its cities in the name of ‘beautification’ and ‘development’. Landless urban poor are the worst affected by forced evictions throughout the Philippines. Although housing rights are protected legally by both the Philippines’ Constitution and the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 (UDHA), the Government of the Philippines continues to use various strategies such as pressuring residents to relinquish these rights by signing waivers and then ‘voluntarily’ relocating them to sites that are not fit to be lived in.

The number of evictions in Metro Manila has increased significantly since 2005 due to the rehabilitation of the Philippines National Railway system referred to as the Northrail-Southern Linkage Project. Most of those affected by this infrastructure ‘development’ project are informal settlers who have lived along the railway tracks for a few decades. Once completed, the Northrail-Southern Linkage Project is expected to alleviate existing traffic congestion in Metro Manila, improve transport between the airports and seaports of the Manila-Clark-Subic economic triangle, and provide easy access to Central and Northern Luzon’s new economic growth areas. The Project will also be responsible for the forced eviction of 80,000 families (400,000 people) – the largest planned displacement of people in the history of the Philippines.

To date, nearly 29,000 families (145,000 people) have been moved (22,000 families from the Northrail tracks and 7,000 from the Southern tracks) to several relocation sites far (approximately 40 km) from Metro Manila. COHRE’s research reveals that the living conditions at most of the relocation sites are appalling due to a lack of basic services such as potable water, electricity and sanitation facilities. Local NGOs in Manila report that most of the families who were moved from the Northrail tracks had to live in tents for several months at the relocation sites.

Under international human rights law and Philippines law those facing eviction have the right to consultation and adequate relocation. The site they are moved to must already have: potable water, electricity, sewerage facilities and an efficient solid waste disposal system and access to transportation facilities. It is also preferable that the relocation sites are situated in near-city and in-city areas close to the evictees’ sources of livelihood. However, the living conditions at several of the relocation sites clearly indicate that the Government of the Philippines has fallen far short of fulfilling its obligations to those who have been relocated due to the Northrail-Southern Linkage Project.

COHRE’s research reveals that there have been numerous problems associated with the relocation process. These include: a lack of consultation with affected families; carrying out evictions and relocations before the sites are habitable; insufficient Government loans to affected families for the construction of homes; lack of livelihood opportunities for those who have been relocated because the sites are far away from Metro Manila; and siting one of the relocation sites adjacent to a mammoth garbage dump.

Under the relocation scheme, the Government provides each family with a loan (payable in 25-30 years with 6 – 9 % interest per annum), which ranges from between US \$ 500 to US \$ 4000 per family. In many cases the loan is not sufficient to construct a house. Large numbers of houses visited by COHRE at the Southville relocation site in Cabuyao (home to 7,000 families) are incomplete with no roofs and dirt floors. Research shows that the distance between the relocation sites and the residents’ sources of livelihood in Metro Manila have caused severe hardship for many families. According to the Urban Poor Associates (UPA) more than 70 percent of families in Southville, Cabuyao, have a family member who works in Metro Manila. It also found that the incidence of hunger in the relocation sites was double that experienced by communities living adjacent to the railway tracks.

COHRE visited the Southville relocation site in Cabuyao, which is situated adjacent to a garbage dumpsite, in July this year. The garbage dump was still in operation at the time of COHRE's visit but has been closed since. However, the dump continues to pose a severe health risk to residents of the Southville relocation site as it contains highly toxic materials and contaminants. During heavy rains in August this year, floodwaters contaminated by run off from the dumpsite flooded all the houses at the relocation site and took up to six hours to subside. According to Ecological Waste Coalition, residents of the Southville relocation site are exposed to 'high levels of contaminants that are released through dump fires, landfill gas migration and surface and underground leachate migration.' Six infants from the Southville relocation site have died this year of pneumonia, sepsis and diarrhoea. Six children also died from a dengue outbreak at the site last month, with a further 18 being infected with the virus due to the serious health hazards posed by the dumpsite, and lack of safe drinking water and poor drainage facilities and sanitation.

Forced evictions and demolitions of homes have also been carried out in preparation for the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit to be held in Metro Cebu, next week. Forty two (210 people) families were left homeless when their houses situated at the front of the Shangri-la Mactan Island Resort and Spa in Mactan Island, were demolished by the police in late September. The cleared land will be used as a parking lot for Summit participants. Reports indicate the demolitions were violent with police using water cannons and truncheons to disperse the barricade put up by those trying to resist the demolitions. Scores were hurt, including women and children and 12 were arrested and detained during the demolitions. More than 600 homes were also demolished in Mandaue City and Lapu-lapu City since September 2006, in preparation for the Summit. Of the 600 families (3,000 people) rendered homeless by these demolitions, only 100 families were moved to a temporary relocation site. The temporary relocation site has no basic services such as electricity and water. These evictions clearly reveal that large international conferences such as the ASEAN Summit are almost always accompanied by human rights violations such as the forced eviction of whole communities in host cities.

### **The Philippines: Facts at a glance**

The Government of the Philippines is in violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11), the Constitution of the Philippines (Article XIII, Section 10) and the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 (Section 28).

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Large numbers of houses visited by COHRE in July at the Southville relocation site in Cabuyao (home to 7,000 families) are incomplete with no roofs and dirt floors. Research shows that the distance (approximately 30 – 40 km) between the relocation sites and the residents' sources of livelihood in Metro Manila have caused severe hardship for many families.

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