

****COHRE and RUIG/GIAN Joint Media Statement****

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The Olympic Games have displaced more than two million people in the last 20 years, disproportionately affecting minorities such as the homeless, the poor, Roma and African-Americans, according to a new report, *Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights*.

Jean du Plessis, Executive Director (a.i.) of the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), said, “Our research shows that little has changed since 1988 when 720,000 people were forcibly displaced in Seoul, South Korea, in preparation for the Summer Olympic Games. It is shocking and entirely unacceptable that 1.25 million people have already been displaced in Beijing, in preparation for the 2008 Games, in flagrant violation of their right to adequate housing. These figures show the extent to which mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, can often leave a negative housing legacy for the local population.”

A research team, coordinated by COHRE, has spent three years studying seven past and future Olympic host cities (Seoul, Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London) and the impact the Games have had on the housing rights of their residents. The project was supported by the Geneva International Academic Network (RUIG/GIAN), and was undertaken in conjunction with a number of partner organisations.

As a result of this study, COHRE has developed a set of guidelines for all stakeholders in future host cities to follow in order to minimise the negative impacts arising from mega-events. These *Multi-Stakeholder Guidelines on Mega-Events and the Protection and Promotion of Housing Rights* also seek to highlight opportunities for promoting positive housing legacies to be enjoyed long after the event has been staged.

The report also addresses the housing impacts of other mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup, World Expos, IMF/World Bank Conferences and even beauty pageants such as the Miss World and Miss Universe contests. It demonstrates that mega-events can both directly and indirectly cause a number of housing rights violations and other negative effects. These include: forced eviction; displacement; rising housing costs (leading to unaffordability of housing); reductions in the provision of social, public, and low-cost housing; discrimination against minorities and the poor; criminalisation of homelessness; expropriation of private property; and lack of transparency and exclusion of local residents from participation in decision-making.

Du Plessis said: “No person or community should be forcibly evicted for the sake of a sporting event. No-one should be displaced due to a cultural celebration. The rich diversity of a community should not be hidden, moved or destroyed for the sake of a beauty pageant. It is possible (and imperative) for mega-events to be organised without forcibly evicting people, without criminalising the homeless and without rendering housing unaffordable. COHRE calls on all parties to ensure that adequate attention to the housing rights of anyone affected by the hosting of such events is mainstreamed into the bidding, selection and implementation processes. COHRE also calls on affected communities and support organisations to closely monitor these processes, and to take action to ensure that no housing rights are violated as a result of mega-events. This is important not just for the Olympic Games, but for all mega-events.”

The principal findings detailed in the *Fair Play for Housing Rights* report are:

- More than **1.25 million people** have already been displaced in **Beijing, China**, in preparation for the 2008 Games. COHRE’s research reveals that a total of **1.5 million people** will be displaced from their homes by the time the Games commence in August 2008. These figures do not include approximately 400,000 migrants living ‘temporarily’ in 171 neighbourhoods in situations of extreme insecurity, having come to Beijing due to lack of livelihood opportunities in rural areas. Victims of

forced evictions, their legal representatives and housing rights defenders who oppose or challenge evictions are subject to ongoing intimidation, harassment and, in some instances, imprisonment for their activism.

- Already, five years before the Olympic Games are due to be staged in **London** in 2012, over **1,000 people** face the threat of displacement from their homes, and housing prices are escalating. It is possible at this early stage to predict that construction of the Olympic venues and facilities in London will disproportionately affect a number of groups: in particular the poor; low-income earners; residents of public housing; and ethnic minorities such as Gypsies and Travellers.
- Approximately **2,700 Roma** were directly affected by the preparation and staging of the Olympic Games in **Athens**. For the Roma, the Olympic Games served to aggravate the discrimination and marginalisation they already suffered, leading to further segregation, violent forced evictions and setbacks in their prospects of securing adequate and humane living conditions.
- The staging of the Olympic Games exacerbated the escalation of housing costs in **Sydney**. Between 1993 (when Sydney was selected as the Host City of the 2000 Summer Olympic Games) and 1998, Sydney's **rents increased by 40 percent**, compared with Melbourne, the Australian city with the next biggest increase in rents, which was only 9.6 percent over the same period.
- Approximately **30,000 poor residents** were displaced from their homes in **Atlanta** by gentrification, the demolition of public housing, rental speculation, and urban renewal projects associated with the Olympics. Approximately **2,000 public housing units** were demolished and nearly **6,000 residents** displaced. **African-Americans** were disproportionately affected by displacements, housing unaffordability, and harassment and arrests of the homeless. The criminalisation of homelessness was a key feature of the 1996 Atlanta Games: **9,000 arrest citations** were issued to homeless people in Atlanta in 1995 and 1996 as part of the Olympic Games 'clean up'.
- The completion of the Olympic Games project in **Barcelona** resulted in the displacement and relocation of **624 families (approximately 2,500 people)**. Increases in the prices of housing for rent and sale led to a drastic decline in housing affordability, as the **cumulative increase from 1986 to 1993 was 139 percent for sale prices and nearly 145 percent for rentals**. There was also a drastic decrease in the availability of **public housing**, with a **cumulative decrease of 75.92 percent** from 1986 to 1992. In areas surrounding the Olympic Village communities, between **90 and 100 percent of the Roma** were displaced.
- In **Seoul, South Korea**, **720,000 people** were forcibly displaced from their homes in preparation for the 1988 Summer Games. The urban poor and other minorities were disproportionately affected. Street peddlers, beggars and the homeless were driven away from the city in preparation for the Games.

COHRE's Du Plessis also said, "The negative housing impacts that are often inflicted on communities and individuals before, during and after mega-events, are not simply undesirable side-effects. In many instances, they constitute egregious violations of international human rights law, in particular the right to adequate housing. This is in complete contradiction to the spirit and ideals of the Olympic Movement, which aims to foster peace, solidarity and respect for universal fundamental principles. The Olympic Movement has made admirable commitments towards creating positive housing legacies in its *Olympic Charter*, *Code of Ethics*, and the *Olympic Movement Agenda 21*. Yet COHRE's research indicates that there is unfortunately still a long way to go for the Olympic Movement to meet these commitments."

The *Fair Play for Housing Rights* report calls for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other mega-event governing bodies to fully integrate housing rights considerations into the selection criteria used for judging bids to host a mega-event. It also emphasises the need for event organisers to incorporate housing rights considerations into all aspects of the preparation and staging of the event. The report shows that governments, municipal authorities, event organisers, bid committees, and even

corporate sponsors, athletes and spectators, all have a role to play in respecting and upholding the housing rights of the local residents.

UN Sports Ambassador, the Kenyan long-distance runner and three times champion of the world half marathon Tegla Loroupe, supported COHRE and its project partners in launching the *Fair Play for Housing Rights* report and the *Multi-Stakeholder Guidelines on Mega-Events and the Protection and Promotion of Housing Rights*. Loroupe, said, “As an Olympian, I’m proud to have participated in an event that brings people of all nationalities and cultures together, and thereby builds community spirit and fosters cross-cultural understanding. Such a wonderful event should not mean that local people suffer from displacement and discrimination – they too should benefit.”

The *Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights* project, coordinated by COHRE and supported by RUIG/GIAN, was undertaken in partnership with UN-HABITAT, the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General on Sport for Development and Peace, the Graduate Institute of International Studies (IUHEI), the Geneva School of Architecture, the University of Toronto, the New York University Law School and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The *Fair Play for Housing Rights* report, the *Multi-Stakeholder Guidelines* and background papers on each of the Olympic Cities studied are available online at: www.cohre.org/mega-events

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