



COHRE Media Release

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COHRE Releases Report on Housing Rights in Durban

Monday, 6 October 2008 ► The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, based in Geneva, today released a report on housing rights in Durban. While recognizing the efforts of the eThekweni Municipality to build a considerable number of houses each year, the report concludes that the houses being built are often located so far out of town as to make them unviable for many people due to unaffordable transport costs to work, schools, and hospitals. The report also expresses serious concern about the size and quality of the houses that are being built and over the failure to provide adequate levels of basic services to shack dwellers while they wait for formal housing. In some instances levels of basic services in shack settlements are inadequate to the point of being life threatening according to COHRE's research.

COHRE's executive director, Salih Booker, said today that, "We have a profound concern about the high number of unlawful evictions carried out by the eThekweni Municipality. Evictions are a routine occurrence in Durban and COHRE researchers did not come across a single instance in which an eviction by the Municipality had been carried out in accordance with the law." COHRE expresses a profound concern about the high levels of state repression, much of it clearly unlawful, to which the shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo was subject from 2005 until 2007.

COHRE is pleased to note that since the research phase of the Durban Fact Finding Mission was concluded relations between organised shack dwellers' and the Municipality have improved significantly. There has been a dramatic decline in allegations of police harassment and all parties seem optimistic about the current negotiations that the Project Preparation Trust is facilitating between Abahlali baseMjondolo and the eThekweni Municipality. COHRE is also encouraged to note that the eThekweni Municipality is now exploring the prospect of dramatically stepping up the provision of basic services to a number of settlements and of developing two pilot projects in which settlements will be upgraded in situ via the Breaking New Ground policy.

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However COHRE remains concerned about unlawful evictions, the current poor levels of basic services in shack settlements and, in particular, the very high instance of often fatal shack fires and the dangers to which residents, especially women, are subjected by the lack of adequate sanitation in many settlements. Finally the COHRE report highlights the dangers posed to housing rights across KwaZulu-Natal by the Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act.

COHRE is an international human rights non-governmental organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland, with offices throughout the world. COHRE has consultative status with the United Nations and Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. COHRE works to promote and protect the right to adequate housing for everyone, everywhere, including preventing or remedying forced evictions. COHRE's work includes undertaking fact-finding missions to cities around in the world.