Today, July 19th 2016, about three hundred men, women and children from waterfront communities threatened with ongoing forced evictions by the Rivers State Government took to the streets to protest against the 7-day ultimatum given to the communities to vacate the waterfronts. It is estimated that at least 60,000 people are expected to be affected by the demolitions of 17 waterfront settlements in Rivers State. Details can be found in the joint press statement attached

The rationale for the demolition is that these settlements harbor kidnappers and cultist hideouts, unfortunately this has been sold to the general public and has gained sentiment for the government.

A press briefing was fixed to hold by 10:00 am, and afterwards the community folks planned to proceed from the Mile One fly-over to the Rivers State Government House. However due to the uncertainty and eagerness of the affected community members to stall losing their homes and source of livelihood, they proceeded to the Government house without holding the press briefing.

The procession resulted in the release of teargas and rubber bullets by the fully armed police officers present, the protest was pushed back to UTC junction where the community members were spoken to by civil society organisation representatives who re-organized and requested they acted in unity and spoke with one voice.
However, they were blocked by the police present and given strict order not to go beyond a certain point, failure to comply would have resulted in manhandling of citizens. The agitated citizens expressed their grievances to the media houses present at the protest while demanding that a peaceful demonstration to stop the demolition of their homes was their right.

There was heavy police deployment. Caution had to be taken because a slight provocation could have turned the whole protest sour and played to the favor of the government. Amongst those present was Anti-Cultism Squad, Anti-Kidnapping Squad, Operation Swift Action, Mobile Police and an armoured tank.

The arrival of the Deputy Police Commissioner put to rest some grievances and asked that some persons be chosen to represent them at a meeting with the Governor who was ready to speak with a delegation and not address the entire group of protesters. Updates on this meeting will be provided after they are made available by the community delegation.

This was done, the crowd dispersed while some stayed back to wait for the delegates.
JOINT PRESS STATEMENT: COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS CONDEMN FORCED EVICTIONS AT EAGLE ISLAND AND DECRY THREAT OF FURTHER EVICTIONS LOOMING OVER MORE THAN 60,000 IN 17 COMMUNITIES IN PORT HARCOURT

Less than two weeks after the forced eviction of thousands of hard-working urban poor living at Andoni Village and Redeemed Village, Eagle Island, on 15 July 2016 the Rivers State Government has announced that 17 more entire communities in Port Harcourt will be evicted with only 7 days’ wholly inadequate notice via radio broadcast. Should the Government proceed with its threats, an estimated 60,000 persons will be rendered homeless and driven into poverty by loss of livelihoods and other hardships associated with homelessness and displacement.

We, the undersigned communities and members of civil society, decry this unlawful and callous threat and call for the Rivers State Government to seriously reconsider its plans before it takes irreversible action that violates the fundamental human rights of 60,000 innocent persons and undermines the security and long-term development goals of all residents of Port Harcourt.

Any person that has witnessed the horrors of forced eviction, where persons are thrown out of their homes and have their livelihoods and communities destroyed overnight, cannot believe this is the path to security and development of our society. Studies have shown the terrible long-term impacts of forced evictions on the incomes, health, and education of evictees.
We understand that His Excellency, Governor Wike, has cited the 2015 amendments to the Rivers State Anti-Kidnapping Law to justify the recent spate of demolitions and threatened evictions. Yet, the reality is that the demolitions being carried out are not targeted at actual kidnappers; instead, they are a pretext for evicting thousands of innocent children, women, men, and elderly persons who are employed in legitimate businesses through which they eke out their modest livings, and from which they pay their children’s school fees and Government taxes and fees. Such persons live in Port Harcourt’s informal settlements because of the lack of affordable housing in the formal sector and make positive contributions every day to the city’s economy.

The false impression given to the public must be corrected. The Anti-Kidnapping Law does not authorize mass evictions nor does it allow the demolition of properties before the persons accused of kidnapping offenses under the law are arrested, prosecuted, and found guilty in line with the right to fair hearing protected by Section 36 of the 1999 Constitution.

If the Government is allowed to so flagrantly evade the rule of law and take the law into its own hands to trample on the rights of thousands of innocent citizens, then all of society will suffer. Injustice will not stop with the poor and those living in informal settlements. The greed for land will render no one safe from eviction and seizure of all that he or she has worked for in his life. We are members of the affected communities. We are members of other communities in Port Harcourt who fear that we will be next should our brothers and sisters fall to the present threat.

We are members of communities from as far away as Lagos who stand in solidarity with those who are under threat today. We are members of civil society who work with the affected communities, visit them on a regular basis, and know their realities.
We know the communities under threat are ready to work with government in any legitimate law enforcement approach to resolving security concerns and rooting out criminals who may be hiding in different corners of the city. We know the communities under threat are ready to partner with government to improve their infrastructure and quality of life through in situ upgrading.

We also know that no good can come of the present threat of eviction, just as no good has come from the long list of prior forced evictions in Port Harcourt. Is our society safer today? Is poverty lessened? Have we gotten rid of informal settlements or simply pushed them from one place to another? We must all ask ourselves these questions rather than blindly following our fears.

Already, thousands are homeless and destitute from the evictions in Eagle Island two weeks ago. Should the Government proceed with the plan outlined on radio on 15 July 2016, over 60,000 more innocent Nigerians will be forced out of their homes and businesses and communities. This is a gross violation of these citizens’ right to fair hearing, right to property, right to adequate shelter, and will equally undermine their right to health and right to education of their children. We are deeply concerned that the Government would run roughshod over all these rights in the present-day democratic dispensation; we call for a break from the past of such abuses and for Government to partner with us – communities and civil society – to find a better way forward.

**COMMUNITIES UNDER THREAT:**

AWGU WATERFRONT
AFIKPO/AWKUZU WATERFRONT
SOKU WATERFRONT
ELECHI PHASE I WATERFRONT
ABBA WATERFRONT
TIMBER WATERFRONT
ELECHI PHASE II WATERFRONT
NANKA WATERFRONT
ECHUE WATERFRONT
URUALLA WATERFRONT
AKOKWA WATERFRONT
OBIDANSOR WATERFRONT
OJIKE WATERFRONT
EGEDE WATERFRONT
ANOZIE WATERFRONT

“OVER 60,000 MORE INNOCENT NIGERIANS WILL BE FORCED OUT OF THEIR HOMES AND BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES”
SIGNED:

NIGERIAN SLUM/INFORMAL SETTLEMENT FEDERATION
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/NIGERIANFEDERATION.NET

JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES (JEI)
WWW.JUSTEMPOWER.ORG

STAKEHOLDER DEMOCRACY NETWORK (SDN)
WWW.STAKEHOLDERDEMOCRACY.ORG

SOCIAL ACTION
WWW.SACTION.ORG

COLLABORATIVE MEDIA ADVOCACY PLATFORM (CMAP)
WWW.CMAPPING.NET
21 July 2016

His Excellency
Chief Barr. Nyesom Wike (CON)
The Executive Governor of Rivers State
Government House, Port Harcourt
Rivers State

Your Excellency,

URGENT APPEAL FOR OFFICIAL RETRACTION OF NOTICE TO VACATE OUR COMMUNITIES; REQUEST FOR MEETING TO DISCUSS PARTNERSHIP FOR SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

We, the residents and leaders of Awgu, Elechi Phase I, Elechi Phase II, Urualla, Ojike, Awkuzu, Afikpo, Abba, Nanka, Akokwa, Egede, Soku, Timber, Echue, Anozie, and Obidiansor Waterfront communities, write to appreciate the audience with your Excellency on 19 July 2016 following our peace protest after the notices issued to our communities - comprising more than 60,000 hard-working, law-abiding citizens - giving us 7 days to vacate our homes and businesses.

Since our return to our communities on 19 July, following our audience with your Excellency, we have endeavored to spread the reassuring news that your Excellency has instructed that the notices to our communities be officially retracted by the Commissioner of Urban Development.

However, you will understand that some members of our communities struggle to believe your Excellency’s pronouncement without official proof. We have been monitoring the radio, television and press in hope of an official announcement that will calm remaining fears in the communities. However, as of this afternoon, 21 July 2016, we have not seen or heard such official statement.

It will be recalled that the notices to vacate our communities were, in fact, issued both by radio and by posting in our communities. The radio announcement attributed to the Commissioner of Urban Development was broadcast on 15 July 2016 at about 10am on Rhythm FM 93.7. Meanwhile, between 15-18 July 2016, paper notices signed by the Director Development Control were posted in at least six of our communities. We attach copies of four of these notices.

To assuage the fears of our community members and allow us to once again sleep with both eyes closed, we hereby respectfully but urgently appeal for the above listed notices to be officially vacated or retracted, in written form so as to counter the written notices already served on our communities, at the earliest opportunity and prior to the expiration of the written notices; and for the same announcement to be broadcast repeatedly on radio and television to reach all affected.
Additionally, in light of the recent crisis and the fears awakened in our communities as a result, we further appeal for a meeting between your Government and our communities, together with our legal representatives and civil society partners, to discuss partnership between our communities and the Government to promote security and inclusive development of our communities.

We may be reached via return correspondence to the above-listed address or by calling our communities' legal representative, Barr. Ifeyinwa G. Nwabueze at 0837579630/08127917444.

Yours faithfully, the undersigned representatives of the affected communities:

Etire Itubo G., Abba Waterfront

Napoleon Antomi, Nanka Waterfront

Amonia George, Elechi II Waterfront

Uesoo Kesuani E., Obiadanso Waterfront

Joseph Nta, Obiadanso Waterfront

Empire Okon, Obiadanso Waterfront

Dennison Amachree, Afikpo Waterfront

Jerry Dappa, Obiadanso Waterfront

Vite Kieta, Egede Waterfront

Blessing Gregory, Timber Waterfront

Okora Sunday, Timber III Waterfront

Barika Nane Nwudeezua, Egede Waterfront

cc: Commissioner of Urban Development of Rivers State
Attorney-General of Rivers State
Commissioner of Police, Rivers State, c/o Deputy Commissioner of Policy
UN Habitat Nigeria
Amnesty International Nigeria
Justice & Empowerment Initiatives - Nigeria
Nigerian Slum / Informal Settlement Federation
Collaborative Media Advocacy Platform (CMAP)
Stakeholders Democracy Network (SDN)
Social Action
Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)
Initiative for Advancement of Humanity (IAH)

Original Received By: Dr. Patricia Emeziapai (DA)
Replied: 29th July 2016