Advocates: Cambodian “AIDS Colony” Violates Human Rights

July 31, 2009

More than 100 HIV/AIDS and social justice groups are urging the Cambodian government to stop sending families affected by HIV/AIDS to a so-called “AIDS colony,” Human Rights Watch reports. They delivered their message via a joint letter to the country’s prime minister and health minister.

The families were displaced to make way for commercial development in Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s capital city. In June, 20 HIV-affected homeless families living in Borei Keila, a housing development in Phnom Penh, were moved to a remote site in Tuol Sambo, 15 miles from the city. Their housing consists of poorly ventilated metal sheds with inadequate sanitation, no running water and little to no access to health care. Locals refer to the sheds as “the AIDS village.”

“The Cambodian government needs to establish a fair and open process for all to receive the housing and services they need,” said Kevin Moody of The Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+). “People living with HIV—like all others—need adequate living conditions that do not threaten their health and a way to earn a livelihood, so that they can provide for themselves and their families. Grouping families affected by HIV in this way exposes them to further stigma and discrimination; steps must be taken to end this discrimination now.”

While at least 11 families scheduled to live at Tuol Sambo are eligible to move into new replacement housing at Borei Keila, they have yet to receive the housing they were promised.

The letter calls on the government to stop moving families to the Tuol Sambo site; improve conditions at the site to meet minimum standards for shelter, sanitation and clean water; ensure full access to medical services; work to address immediate and long-term concerns regarding housing, health, safety, employment and reintegration into society; and to allow eligible families to move into on-site housing at Borei Keila immediately.

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