

# Olympic scale of sport-induced displacement

by Jean du Plessis

**The Olympic Games have displaced more than two million people in the last 20 years, disproportionately affecting particular groups such as the homeless, the poor, Roma and African-Americans. Mega-events such as the Olympic Games often leave a negative housing legacy for local populations.**

Researchers from the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), supported by the Geneva International Academic Network (RUIG/GIAN),<sup>1</sup> have studied seven past and future Olympic host

cities. Their report shows that little has changed since 720,000 people were forcibly displaced in Seoul, South Korea, in preparation for the 1988 Summer Olympic Games.

In Beijing the authorities are clearing large swathes of residential districts ahead of the 2008 Olympics. 1.25 million people have already been displaced from their homes and it is estimated that a further quarter of a million will be displaced by the time the Games commence in August 2008. These figures do not include the 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. Legal representatives and housing rights defenders who oppose or challenge the forced evictions are subject to ongoing intimidation, harassment and, in some instances, imprisonment for their activism. Evictions in Beijing often involve the complete demolition of poor people's houses. The inhabitants are then forced to relocate far from their communities and workplaces, with inadequate transportation networks adding significantly to their cost of living. In Beijing, and in China more generally, the process of demolition and eviction is characterised by arbitrariness and lack of due process. In many cases, tenants are given little or no notice of their eviction and do not receive the promised compensation. This lack of adequate compensation (or any compensation at all) sometimes leaves the evictees at risk of homelessness and spiralling poverty. The forced evictions are often violent and abuses committed during the eviction processes have multiplied.

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 shows how these directly and indirectly cause a number of housing rights violations including forced eviction; 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.

Already, five years before the 2012 Olympic Games are due to be staged

in London, over 1,000 people face the threat of displacement from their homes, and housing prices are escalating. It is clear even at this early stage that construction of the

other mega-event governing bodies to fully integrate housing rights considerations into the selection criteria used for judging bids to host a mega-event. Organisers must

transparently incorporate consideration of housing rights into all aspects of the preparation and staging of events. Guidelines we have prepared outline opportunities for promoting positive housing legacies to be enjoyed long after events have been staged. These guidelines urge governments, municipal authorities, event organisers,

bid committees, and even corporate sponsors, athletes and spectators to:

- assess, monitor and evaluate potential and actual housing impacts of mega-events
- avoid disrupting existing homeless populations
- ensure that staging a mega-event contributes to stable housing markets and delivery of affordable housing
- use mega-events as an opportunity to increase the supply of low-income, public and social housing and improve the existing housing stock
- hold violators of housing rights to account and ensure the availability of remedies for victims.

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1. [www.ruig-gian.org](http://www.ruig-gian.org)



*Giant banner hung on the front of the Broadway squats in Sydney, Australia.*

Olympic venues and facilities will disproportionately affect 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.

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. Around 2,000 public housing units were demolished and nearly 6,000 residents displaced. African-Americans were disproportionately affected by displacements. Criminalisation of homelessness was a key feature of the 1996 Atlanta Games.

COHRE calls on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and