

10 November 2016

Lagos, Nigeria

**PRESS RELEASE: OVER 30,000 HOMELESS
AFTER POLICE USE DEMOLITION BY FIRE AND
BULLDOZER WORKING IN DEAD OF NIGHT
DESTROY OTODO GBAME COMMUNITY
DESPITE SUBSISTING INJUNCTION**



One month after the Governor of Lagos State went to the media announcing the Lagos State Government's intention to demolish "shanties" along waterfronts across the state – and just days after the Lagos State High Court issued an injunction restraining the same – the Nigerian Police Force and Lagos State Government have moved into Otodo Gbame community in full force.

In the early morning hours of 9 November 2016, a gang of boys with reported ties to the powerful Elegushi Chieftaincy Family, entered Otodo Gbame community – a peaceful fishing settlement on the edge of the Lagos Lagoon in Lekki Phase I, made up predominantly of Eguns and other ethnic minorities in Lagos – and began setting fire to houses in the community.

When police arrived on the scene shortly thereafter, according to eyewitness reports, they began to lend assistance to the spreading of the fire. They shot into the community and chased away persons bringing water to quench the fire. They helped to set more structures on fire. Four persons – two women, one man, and one child – reportedly drowned as they rushed into water.

It was only when help from other Egun communities around Lagos Lagoon such as Makoko and Oke Ira Nla arrived that residents began succeeding to put out the fire and police turned back.

By the time JEI arrived in the Otodo Gbame, about a third of the community – an estimated 800 structures – had been razed to the ground and fires were still smoldering across the community. An estimated 10,000 people rendered homeless in a matter of hours tried to recover what properties they could and dozens of people huddled in boats off the shore of the community.

At least 15 police vehicles were on ground and, around 1:30pm, the Commissioner of Police Fatai Owooseni arrived on the scene in person for "inspection" and to order the community sealed.

Interviews with affected residents throughout the day confirmed the complicity of the police in the spreading of the fire and loss of life in the early part of the day. They also indicate that police are working in tandem with those that initiated the fire to serve private interests of Otodo Gbame's wealthier and more powerful neighbors. Residents pointed fingers at the Elegushi Chieftaincy Family and to the neighboring International Children's School.

On 7 November 2016 – just two days before – Hon Justice Onigbanjo of the Lagos State High Court issues an injunction restraining the Lagos State Government and the Lagos State Commissioner of Police from demolishing waterfront communities – including Otodo Gbame – or evicting residents therefrom or otherwise giving effect to the 9 October 2016 eviction threat.

As evening fell in Otodo Gbame, tens of thousands of residents – some newly homeless and some terrified but lucky to still have their homes – tried to get some rest after the wearying day. JEI-trained paralegals had delivered a copy of the subsisting injunction to the local Ilasan Divisional Police Station to ensure their awareness and pasted the order around the community.

Shortly after midnight on 10 November 2016, however, JEI received reports from numerous residents of Otodo Gbame that a bulldozer with an escort of at least four police vehicles had started working to destroy remaining homes. There has been no indication that our efforts to notify the Nigerian Police Force at various levels – from Zone II Command to the Complaints Response Unit (CRU) in the office of the Inspector General of Police – have stopped the demolition ongoing with blatant impunity and disregard for life and wellbeing of citizens.

According to Edukpo Tina, a young woman in Otodo Gbame interviewed in the early morning of 10 November, “Police came again after midnight with caterpillar [bulldozer] and started breaking everywhere, putting fire on peoples’ houses. They are seriously beating our people and threatening to shoot unless we leave. All of us are on top of water now, there is nowhere to go.”

JEI-Nigeria strongly condemns the actions of the Nigerian Police Force and any branches of the Lagos State Government or private parties at whose behest the NPF may be working. We decry the extremely false and misleading press release issued by the Nigerian Police Force in the late afternoon of 9 November 2016 that seeks to characterize the police’s actions as a “rescue,” while announcing that the community in question will be taken over by the Lagos State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development and remaining structures will be demolished.

We note that there is absolutely no legal basis for eviction or taking over of land in the aftermath of either security or fire incident. We further note there have been no statutory or paper notices whatsoever served on any residents of Otodo Gbame. Rather, the police are acting completely outside the scope of the law and in overt disregard for a subsisting order of court. We call on all conscientious citizens concerned for democracy and rule of law to join in condemning this action.

See a copy of [the injunction](#) and [pictures and videos of the suffering in Otodo Gbame community](#) on 9 November 2016 are available for download and free use by journalists.

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