

Beijing, China: Stop the Violent Eviction of the Urban Poor; Respect the Housing Rights of the People - A declaration of civil society organisations

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On November 18, 2017, a fire broke out in Daxing District of Beijing, a suburb densely populated by low-income migrant workers. The fire killed at least 19 people and injured 8. After the fire, in the name of “improving the cityscape”, the Beijing Municipal Government embarked on an illegal eviction of migrant workers by force, while cutting off their electricity and water supplies. Tens of thousands of grassroots residents were forced out of their homes when temperature hovered around freezing point.

We (a group of civil society organisations) are outraged at how the authorities treated its people as “low-end population”. These internal migrant workers are in fact the cornerstone of China’s astounding economic growth. Since the economic reform, hundreds of millions of migrant workers are drawn to the cities from their rural hometowns and become the engine that powers the thriving industries. However, these workers are often denied reasonable wages, regardless of their hard-work. As a result, most migrant workers are unable to afford dignified living conditions in the cities. Worse still, municipal authorities also deem migrant workers as disposable “others”, and exclude them from the urban social security system through the Household Registration (*Hukou*) System. Thus, migrant workers’ needs and rights are often neglected in urban planning, education, medical services and other policies.

The Household Registration (*Hukou*) System has been adopted by the Chinese Government not only as a means to control the population, it also deprives the “migrant population” of citizenship rights in places other than their municipality of origin. The System has become such a deeply rooted belief and it continues to exploit the labour of the “migrant population” at the expenses of their social protections and well-beings. In past decades, the institutional discrimination against migrants has been further reinforced by the Chinese Government, as they are regarded as second-class citizens and the first to be sacrificed when crises emerge. During the financial crises in 2008 and 2012, for instance, the government drove out unemployed migrant workers and forced them to move back to their hometowns.

The fundamental cause of the Daxing fire is that the government failed to resolve the safety risks occurring in the urban sprawl in time. However, the Beijing Municipal authorities unreasonably shirked responsibilities to the “migrant population”, as if all the urban problems are simply caused by the migrant population’s “refusal to leave”, disregarding the fact that the development of the city has been built on the exploitation of these low-income migrants. Instead of resolving the fundamental issues, the fact that the authorities have used the Daxing fire as an excuse to evict the migrants to “make the city a better place” is undoubtedly like climbing a tree to catch a fish. To make matters worse, the unhealthy wind of the “eviction of the low-end population” has also been taken up by other provinces and cities. As reported, migrants in certain districts of Shenzhen and Guangzhou have also received eviction notices. The local authorities will need to immediately stop

these discriminating and violent actions, before further humanitarian disasters emerge!

We believe that protecting the people is the responsibility of any government, and we demand the Beijing Municipal Government to:

- 1) Stop forced eviction immediately and actively facilitate the resettlement of the evictees;
- 2) Recognize the grassroots population as important stakeholders in the city and ensure their freedom of movement, right to housing, work, education and medical service are respected in government policies;
- 3) Hold the administrative organs and the staff accountable for the illegal actions and violation of people's rights in the forced evictions;
- 4) Compensate all the financial losses of the residents affected by the forced evictions.

Note□ Administrative Compulsion Law of the People's Republic of China, Article 43 Administrative organs shall not conduct administrative enforcement at night or on a statutory public holiday, except for in an emergency. Administrative organs shall not force the parties concerned to perform the relevant administrative decisions by such means as cutting off the supply of water, electricity, heating or gas for the living of residents.

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Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese
League of Social Democrats
Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China
SACOM
Globalization Monitor
Worker Empowerment
Asia Monitor Resource Centre
Labour Education and Service Network
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Student Fight For Democracy
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Borderless movement
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Left 21
Concerning Grassroots' Housing Rights Alliance
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Voters' Voice
China Labour Bulletin
Councilor Chu Hoi-dick's Office
Ekklesia Hong Kong
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Industrial Relations Institute
Polyu Pavilion
Social Movement Resource Centre(Autonomous 8A)

LU Workers Concern Group
BU movement
Midnight blue
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