

## Habitat Day blighted by plight of 1 billion in the world's slums

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UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 4 (UPI) -- The United Nations marked the World Habitat Day Monday with ceremonies and messages praising the work of the world body and its partners, but the celebration was blighted by campaigners' calls to ease the plight of a billion people who live in slums.

No U.N. estimates on the money spent celebrating the day worldwide are likely to be released but the scale of global observance indicated substantial funds would be spent on habitat "awareness" events either subsidized by U.N. agencies or supported by governmental partners anxious to brush up their own image.

Amnesty International said governments couldn't celebrate the day, which is observed each year on the first Monday of October, while ignoring 1 billion people that to live in slums.

"A couple of weeks ago in New York, governments promised to help 100 million living in slums. The problem is that more than a billion people live in slums. They don't have water, schools, sanitation or healthcare," said Widney Brown, senior director of international law and policy at Amnesty International.

Instead, Amnesty International cited mass evictions of people from slums -- not just in developing countries but also in developed societies. France drew the European Union's ire after it banished Roma communities but the Roma also faced evictions elsewhere in Europe. India ejected slum dwellers from the Commonwealth Games venues. Evictions of slum dwellers in Nigeria have affected more than 200,000 people.

"From France to Zimbabwe to Cambodia, we have documented how governments are destroying homes of some of the poorest people in their countries. Those whose homes are destroyed are failed by the law, they get no compensation and have no place to live," said Brown.

A Millennium Development Goal Summit in New York in September brought leaders together but failed to toughen the wording of a statement calling on governments to stop evictions, despite evidence that such measures drive people further into poverty. Instead, a summit statement asked governments to "reduce slum populations." Amnesty International said that the wording gave rise to fears it would encourage more forced evictions.

"It is time for world leaders to move beyond the rhetoric we heard in New York and take urgent action to protect the rights of people living in slums."

U.N.-Habitat again this year unfurled its "Scroll of Honor," billed as the United Nations' most prestigious award in human settlements development. The awards go to individuals and institutions found to be instrumental in improving living conditions in towns and cities.

Absent from the list were individuals or institutions in some of the worst concentrations of slums -- in Brazil, India, China and Africa outside South Africa. One of the awards went to a housing campaigner in South Africa.

Analysts said popular cinema that romanticized slums had engendered a new kind of voyeuristic tourism. Tourists now regularly visit slums in Mumbai, scene of Danny Boyle's "Slumdog Millionaire," the Jeff Zimbalist-Matt Mochary movie "Favela Rising" and Fernando Meirelles' "City of God" set in Brazil.

Recent media coverage of slums and academic studies on the phenomenon have led to the coinage of a new term, "poorism," analysts said.

Regular poorism travel tours now attract travelers to Brazil, Ethiopia and India. After the 2005 hurricane Katrina, Louisiana became a major site for poorism tours, leaving residents who were fighting for economic recovery with little choice but to accept poorism tourists as a means of income.