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**PRESS RELEASE: OJORA TAKEOVER OF BADIA EAST
ILLUSTRATES SERIOUS ISSUES OF LAND INEQUITY &
FAILURES OF DUE PROCESS IN NIGERIAN COURTS**



Until yesterday, Ajeromi community in Badia East was a densely populated, diverse informal settlement bustling with life at all times of day and night. The original families were Ilajes who were resettled to Badia East by the Federal Government from their nearby fishing villages to make way for the National Theater in 1973.

At the time they came to settle at Badia East between a railway line and a swamp, the present day Ojora was just a small boy and no Ojora Chieftaincy Family asserted ownership of the place where the displaced families landed. Traditional history was yet to be fictionalized.

Only some 30 years later – around the turn of the millennium – did the Ojora Chieftaincy Family begin to assert ownership of wide swaths of Lagos already occupied by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Nigerians – employing a legally sophisticated but greedy campaign of land grab through abusive litigation. The strategy: draw up a survey plan covering hundreds or thousands of hectares and go to court seeking declaration of title of land, naming just a handful of defendants. Win the case against the few – perhaps even orchestrating them not to fight back – then enforce against the many. What kind of enforcement? Extort “ratification fees” or demolish.

Today, Badia East lies in rubbles and Lagos now has over 15,000 newly homeless citizens. Ordinary Nigerians should be afraid. All of us should be wondering, *“Why misery for so many just to satisfy the greed of a few? Why do the courts fail to consider the thousands of persons who would inevitably be affected by such a sweeping judgment in favor of one powerful family? What system of law do we have when such outcomes could occur under the nose of the courts, with the assistance of the police, with everyone who had power to do something turning a blind eye?”*

Human rights and equity offer tools to address such blatant injustice, but the courts systematically refuse to hear such arguments based in fundamental fairness. On the day of the demolition in Badia East, the court registrars stared at an affidavit of urgency in a motion ex parte seeking interim injunction to stop the ongoing demolitions in an application for enforcement of fundamental rights – and steadfastly refused to give a date for hearing of the motion.

Believe it or not, now in September 2015, the courts are still playing the same games as they did in July 1990 when persons threatened with eviction from Maroko came to enforce fundamental rights. Perhaps 10 years from now today’s judges will equally have streets named for them in an upscale estate in Ijora. By then, though, the repeatedly evicted masses will have had enough.

For further enquiries contact Megan Chapman, Co-Executive Director of Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) at 08187196021 or via email at megan@justempower.org

www.justempower.org