

## Forced evictions in Rio favela for 2016 Olympics trigger violent clashes

Rio de Janeiro's preparations for next year's Olympic Games were marred on Wednesday by a bloody confrontation between police and residents who resisted attempts to forcibly remove them from their homes near the stadium construction site.

At least six people were wounded in the face-off at Vila Autódromo, a favela community on the edge of the Olympic Park. About 90% of the 600 residents have already moved after being offered financial compensation, but the remaining holdouts are adamant that they do not want to give up their homes of many years for a mega-event that last little longer than a fortnight.

Wednesday's clashes were the first attempt to forcibly relocate them, following a decree in March by Mayor Eduardo Paes that called for their urgent removal so the Olympic host city can complete its preparations on time.

Two homes were targeted for demolition, according to the mayor's office, which claimed residents pelted police, municipal guardsman and city officials with "stones, rocks and bricks" as soon as the work was authorized. It said four guards were injured.

Residents give a different story. They say about 50 or 60 of them tried to form a human chain around the homes that were due for demolition and that the police used violence, as well as pepper spray, to try to break them up. Only then, they say, did they throw rocks. In response, the police used rubber bullets and percussion grenades.

Residents posted images on their Facebook page of the injuries sustained on their side. It showed blood streaming from the head wounds of a middle-aged woman and man. One of the injured, Penha Silva, was hit near the eye with a riot-police baton, according to her daughter Natalia. "I was right next to her and saw it happen. She is at the hospital right now doing some tests, an x-ray, but thank god she is out of danger."

"They came with bulldozers and fired rubber bullets at the residents as well as percussion grenades," said the head of the Vila Autódromo association, Altair Guimarães. "I was hit with a baton by the municipal guard."

Ocimar da Silva Miranda, whose home was targeted, said he was hit in the arm by a rubber bullet. "We have the right to live here, but they want to take it by force. It's not right," he said. "The mayor is using our lives, our homes, as a way to pay back the loans from the big construction companies that financed his campaign. But it's our lives, our homes."

The holdouts have protested before against what they believe are unjustified and unnecessary demolition plans. They believe they are being evicted so developers can make higher profits once the Olympic Games are finished.

"It's strange that we are being forced out of our homes in the name of public works, yet this is a private investment," said Jane Nascimento de Oliveira, who says she has been offered 400,000 reais (about \$128,000) to move. The city hall says all residents have been offered compensation and alternative housing at a newly built condominium, Parque Carioca, about a kilometre away.

Mayor Paes originally said he would not order forced relocations