

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Zimbabwe: Six years on victims of Operation Murambatsvina still struggling to survive**

Six years to the day that the government of Zimbabwe embarked on a programme of mass forced evictions which left 700,000 people without a home, a livelihood, or both, Amnesty International called on the government to urgently address the plight of survivors.

Survivors of the devastating programme of forced evictions known as Operation Murambatsvina, continue to endure deplorable living conditions, without access to basic essential services and they remain at risk of further forced evictions.

Residents of Operation Garikai settlements, the programme created to resettle some of the victims of the forced evictions following international criticism, are continuing to face daily violations of their right to adequate housing.

Operation Garikai settlements are characterized by large numbers of plastic shacks which have housed entire families since 2005 despite having been erected as temporary shelters. After six years they are torn and soiled, with scraps of material in place to keep out the wind and rain. In bad weather families crammed into the tiny structures have little protection from the elements.

Research by Amnesty International in 2010 discovered a high incidence of newborn deaths in one Operation Garikai settlement, Hopley, on the outskirts of Harare. Women in the community revealed that they believe that the poor housing and lack of basic sanitation in the settlement contributed to the deaths of their newborn babies. Substandard living conditions are compounded by the lack of maternal and newborn healthcare within the community.

It is not only newborns that suffer from the lack of services in Garikai communities. Children who wish to access a basic education face a series of obstacles. The nearest government registered school can be some distance away, so that the walk to school is a daily risk to a child's safety. For children that do reach the nearest school they often suffer discrimination and stigmatization from both teachers and pupils because of where they live.

Many families who are unable to afford the fees for government registered schools resort to sending their children to informal schools that have been set up in the community. These schools are unregistered, without buildings, books or trained teachers and with huge class numbers.

In July 2005 when the UN published a highly critical report on Operation Murambatsvina a few months after the forced evictions, Anna Tibaijuka, the author of the report stated 'The humanitarian consequences of Operation Restore Order [Murambatsvina] are enormous. It will take several years before the people and society as a whole can recover.'

Six years on there is little to demonstrate that there has been any such recovery. In fact survivors who were driven deeper into poverty by the forced evictions are faced with a daily struggle for survival. Lack of secure tenure ensures that they remain in fear of further evictions.

In September 2010 a community of around 20,000 people at one Operation Garikai settlement, Hatcliffe Extension in Harare, were again facing threats of eviction after they were given notice to pay a lease renewal that was out of reach for most of the community.

Many households had no means of meeting the amount set by the government because Operation Murambatsvina, as well as destroying homes, also destroyed the informal employment sector, depriving thousands of reliable income.

Following campaigning by Amnesty International and a coalition of Zimbabwean organizations working on housing rights the threat was withdrawn by the Minister of National Housing and Social Amenities, Giles Mutsekwa, in November 2010.

In December 2010 the Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe, visited Hopley settlement. The Deputy Prime Minister listened to a community describing their daily struggles as a result of inadequate housing and a lack of access to basic essential services which she and her delegation of government officials witnessed first hand as they toured the community on foot.

During the visit to Hopley the Deputy Prime Minister made an apology to the victims of Operation Murambatsvina, and acknowledged that they had been treated inhumanely. However, Amnesty International believes that words alone are not enough to address the serious human rights violations resulting from Operation Murambatsvina. The government should come up with a clear plan to move towards a durable solution.

Public Document

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