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President Robert Mugabe
Office of the President
Munhumutapa Building
Samora Machel Avenue/3rd Street
Box 7700, Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe

13 June 2005

Your Excellency,

It is with a profound sense of shock that Amnesty International has witnessed the events of the past three weeks in Zimbabwe. During this period your government has orchestrated widespread, violent and forced evictions of informal traders and families living in informal settlements. Tens of thousands of people are now homeless, living in the open during winter, without access to adequate shelter, food or clean water. This destruction of homes and livelihoods is taking place against the backdrop of severe food shortages in many areas of Zimbabwe. Amnesty International is daily receiving reports of serious hunger and acute suffering among those rendered homeless by the forced evictions. We have also had deeply disturbing reports of the deaths of several children forced to sleep in the open overnight.

Your government has claimed that this action is intended to "clean up" urban areas and tackle illegal trade in foreign exchange. However, many of those evicted were actually living in areas designated by the government, such as Hatcliffe Extension, and we are not aware of any evidence that they were engaged in any illegal activity. Furthermore, evictions should be carried out only if they fully respect human rights. The evictions which are taking place in Zimbabwe are being carried out without notice, court orders, due process, legal protection, redress or appropriate relocation measures, in violation of Zimbabwe's obligations under international human rights law. During the forced evictions police and other members of the security forces are using excessive force – burning homes, destroying property and beating individuals.

Thousands of informal traders have also been targeted. They have been forcibly removed from market areas across the country and reports indicate that more than 20,000 traders have been arrested for alleged illegal activities. They were given no notice and, in many cases, had their goods destroyed or confiscated and were beaten by police. Many of those arrested had licences or paid rents to local authorities, and there, again, is no evidence of widespread illegal activity.

The complete and wholesale destruction of people's homes and livelihoods constitutes a serious violation of international human rights law, and the most disturbing affront to human dignity.

Amnesty International is also gravely concerned by reports that those made homeless in urban areas are being told they must go and live in the rural areas. No support for such relocation has been provided. Everyone lawfully within the territory of Zimbabwe has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his or her residence. This right can only be restricted under conditions which comply with international law. The mass forced relocation of those made homeless through systematic forced eviction to areas far from their habitual residence is a violation of international human rights law.

Amnesty International is further concerned by what is reported to be a forced and temporary relocation of people to Caledonia Farm, outside Harare. People from Hatcliffe Extension were taken to Caledonia Farm in police trucks on 9 June and forced to leave many of their meagre belongings behind. It is unclear what the purpose of the temporary relocation is, and if there are sufficient facilities such as clean water and access to health care available at this location.

Amnesty International has a long history of engagement with and support for the people of Zimbabwe as they work to realize human rights for all people of Zimbabwe. During the 1970s we protested the use by the minority government of Ian Smith of so-called "protected villages", in which people were forced to live, often severing them from their livelihoods and the possibility of access to adequate food. Today, Amnesty International is protesting again, in the strongest possible terms, the forced eviction and relocation of people in Zimbabwe and the widespread destruction of their homes and livelihoods.

Amnesty International is calling on you to immediately cease all forced evictions, which are driving people into even greater food insecurity in a country already facing severe food shortages.

Amnesty International is also calling on you to ensure that all the victims of forced eviction receive immediate access to temporary emergency shelters, without compromising their freedom of movement and their right not to be forcibly relocated, and emergency relief including blankets, sanitation facilities, food and emergency health care treatment.

I urge you to end immediately the grave human rights violations currently taking place in Zimbabwe. I also urge you to ensure that the Government of Zimbabwe fulfils its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to mobilize all available resources, including those available from the international community, to ensure that rights to, *inter alia*, food, health, and shelter are not violated.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan
Secretary General