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## **Zimbabwe: 700,000 forcibly evicted still ignored five years on**

The government of Zimbabwe must take action to protect hundreds of thousands of people left to survive in substandard settlements five years after a program of mass forced evictions, Amnesty International Zimbabwe and a coalition of partners said today.

Amnesty International and the Coalition Against Forced Evictions are calling on the government to provide adequate alternative accommodation or compensation to those left homeless and jobless.

“It is a scandal that five years on, victims are left to survive in plastic shacks without basic essential services. The needs of these victims are at risk of being forgotten because their voices are consistently ignored,” said Amnesty International Zimbabwe’s director Cousin Zilala.

On 18 May 2005 the government of Zimbabwe began demolishing informal settlements across the country. The program, known as Operation Murambatsvina, affected more than 700,000 people – leaving them without a home or livelihood or both. Most were driven deeper into poverty by the forced evictions, a situation which has been further compounded by Zimbabwe’s economic crisis.

Following widespread local and international condemnation of Operation Murambatsvina, the government embarked on a re-housing programme, known as Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle later in 2005, which aimed to provide shelter for the victims and improve their living conditions. However, it was a dismal failure and now appears to have been abandoned.

“The few houses that were built under the Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle scheme are completely un-inhabitable,” said Cousin Zilala. “They have no floors, windows, water or toilets. Communities living in designated resettlement areas are dependent on humanitarian assistance and self help initiatives for their survival.”

Those affected by Operation Murambatsvina rapidly became invisible; forced to relocate to rural areas, absorbed into existing overcrowded urban housing or pushed into government designated settlements. Those still in cities remain at risk of further forced evictions with no security of tenure. In 2009, Harare council attempted to remove some of the victims of the 2005 forced evictions but was forced to reverse the decision amid protest from housing and human rights organisations.

Since its creation in February 2009, the unity government has done nothing to improve the plight of survivors of the forced evictions and their children who have been born in informal settlements.

Felistas Chinyuku is also the former chairperson of the Porta Farm Residents Association. Porta Farm, a settlement of about 10,000 people, was destroyed by the government in 2005, despite the community

obtaining several court orders barring the authorities from carrying out evictions.

“Five years have passed and many of us are still living in tents,” said Chinyuku a resident at Hopley Farm, on the outskirts of Harare, where the majority of residents survive in make-shift housing.

“There are no schools, no health services and very little sanitation. This is no way for humans to live.”

Residents of Hatcliffe Extension settlement in Harare faced similar injustice in 2005 when the authorities wilfully disregarded lease agreements and destroyed their homes. They have not been compensated for their wrongful eviction and continue to face battles with the authorities; residents are currently being asked to pay prohibitive fees in order to renew their leases.

"Operation Murambatsvina achieved the opposite of the publicly stated objective - restoring order. In Harare, it resulted in overcrowding in poor neighbourhoods with as many as three families sharing a four-roomed house," said Lorraine Mupasiri of Combined Harare Residents Association, one of the coalition partners.

"We are particularly concerned about the rising housing backlog in Harare. More than half a million people are on the waiting list.

The forced evictions drove people not only from their homes, but also from their market stalls, depriving informal traders of their means of earning a living.

Women have been especially affected since they form the majority of informal market traders and in many cases are the primary providers, not only for their own children but also for other children orphaned by the AIDS pandemic.

When informal traders have tried to resuscitate their trade they have been persistently obstructed by the authorities.

“The deplorable living conditions and struggle for survival which victims of Operation Murambatsvina continue to face, reveals the government’s failure to address ongoing injustices against some of the most vulnerable members of Zimbabwean society,” said Cousin Zilala.

Notes to editors:

- This press release is issued by Amnesty International Zimbabwe, Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), Operation Murumbatsvina Survivor Representatives from Hopley Farm, Hatcliffe Extension and Gunhill informal settlement, Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Association (ZCIEA) and Zimbabwe Human Rights Lawyers Association (ZLHR)
- On May 17 coalition representatives will meet/met with Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai to hand over a petition by Operation Murambatsvina victims and their supporters.
- Amnesty International has also released photographs of life at Hatcliffe Extension and Hopley Farm, two settlements on the outskirts of Harare that were set up by government for some of the victims under Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle. The photos are embargoed until 00.01GMT 18 May and can be downloaded from here: [https://adam.amnesty.org/assetbank/action/search?attribute\\_603=%22Operation+Murambatsvina+5th+anniversary%22](https://adam.amnesty.org/assetbank/action/search?attribute_603=%22Operation+Murambatsvina+5th+anniversary%22)
- For the 2005 report Zimbabwe: Quantifying destruction - satellite images of forced evictions, featuring satellite images of forced evictions go to: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR46/014/2006/en>