

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AFR 46/011/2005**

**UA 148/05**      **Fear for safety/ Excessive use of force**

**1 June 2005**

**ZIMBABWE**      **Thousands of informal street traders and residents of informal settlements**

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Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of thousands of informal street traders and residents of informal settlements across Zimbabwe who are being targeted for forcible eviction in a government operation called "Operation *Murambatsvina*" (meaning drive out the rubbish, and referred to by the police as 'restore order').

"Operation *Murambatsvina*" reportedly aims to "clean up" urban areas and tackle illegal trade in foreign exchange. The evictions are being carried out without notice and without court orders. During the evictions, police and other members of the security forces are using excessive force, burning homes, destroying property and beating individuals. In at least one instance police reportedly forced people to destroy their own homes. Amnesty International believes that many more people are in danger of injury as the operation continues.

Since 18 May 2005, many thousands of people have been forcibly removed from informal market areas in Harare by the police. Similar police actions have taken place in across the country in Bulawayo, Mutare, Chitungwiza, Rusape, Murehwa, Gweru, Masvingo and Kadoma. Although the government has claimed that the traders are unlicensed, lawyers have said that many of those arrested last week had licences. The traders have been given no notice and their goods have been destroyed or confiscated. Many traders are alleged to have been beaten during the operation.

Public anger at the destruction of property and livelihoods has resulted in traders and residents of affected areas attacking police. In response, armed police and the armed forces have been sent into some areas to quell unrest, raising further concerns for the safety of the affected communities.

On the night of 26 May 2005, more than 10,000 people were forcibly driven from their homes in the informal settlement of Hatcliffe Extension in northern Harare. Police reportedly destroyed homes – leaving the settlement's families destitute and sleeping in the open. The government has reportedly threatened more evictions from squatter camps around Harare.

In September 2004, Amnesty International reported on the attempted forced eviction of thousands of people from Porta Farm, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Harare, during which police reportedly misused tear gas against residents. The police were acting in defiance of a court order prohibiting the eviction. According to eye-witness testimony the police fired tear gas directly into the homes of the Porta Farm residents. At least 11 people died in the following weeks, after what eyewitnesses claim was exposure to the tear gas. Amnesty International has repeatedly called for a full investigation into the events which took place at Porta Farm and the subsequent deaths, but no investigation is known to have taken place. (See Amnesty International press releases: *Zimbabwe: Ten dead following police misuse of tear gas*, AFR 46/027/2004, 22 September 2004 and *Zimbabwe: Another death at Porta Farm - 11 people now dead following police misuse of tear gas*, AFR 46/028/2004, 1 October 2004)

Amnesty International is very concerned that Porta Farm may again be targeted in the current "clean-up" operation. The residents of Porta Farm have lived there for more than 10 years, and have invested in the development of the area.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of people being forcibly evicted from informal settlements such as Hatcliffe Extension in northern Harare, informal market areas and street stalls, and at the use of force by police and security officers;
- calling on the authorities to investigate the reported use of excessive force by members of the security forces and for this practice to be ended;
- calling for an immediate end to all forced evictions;
- calling for those forcibly evicted from their homes to be given immediate access to shelter, food, clean water and sanitation facilities, and for full compensation and reparation to be made for the loss of homes and property;
- expressing concern that Porta Farm, where at least 11 people died following police misuse of teargas in September 2004, may again be targeted;
- urging the authorities not to attempt to forcibly evict the residents of Porta Farm or any other informal settlement;
- reminding the authorities that evictions must be carried out in full compliance with international human rights law, including with due process, legal protection, redress and appropriate relocation measures.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

His Excellency

The Hon Robert G Mugabe

Office of the President

Private Bag 7700

Causeway

Harare, Zimbabwe

**Fax: + 263 4 734 644**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister for Home Affairs

The Hon Kembo Mohadi

Ministry of Home Affairs

Private Bag 505D

Causeway

Harare, Zimbabwe

**Fax: + 263 4 726 716**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Minister for Local Government, Public Works and National Housing

The Hon Ignatius Chombo

Ministry of Local Government, Public Works

and National Housing

PO Box CY441

Causeway

Harare, Zimbabwe

**Fax: + 263 4 708 848 (If someone answers, ask for the fax)**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

and to diplomatic representatives of Zimbabwe accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 July 2005.