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## **Zimbabwe: Amnesty International Secretary General concludes visit**

(Harare) The human rights situation in Zimbabwe is precarious, and the socio-economic conditions are desperate for the vast majority of Zimbabweans, said Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General, ending a six-day high level mission to Zimbabwe, during which she met with senior government ministers, human rights activists and victims of human rights violations.

“Persistent and serious human rights violations, combined with the failure to introduce reform of the police, army and security forces or address impunity and the lack of clear commitment on some parts of the government are real obstacles that need to be confronted by the top leadership of Zimbabwe.”

Amnesty International said that the Global Political Agreement (GPA) -- which was signed by all main political parties and paved the way for the setting up of the Inclusive Government -- provides a framework for change, but commitment to its implementation is not consistent throughout the government.

“The government must give as much attention to securing human rights reforms as they are to seeking economic resources,” said Irene Khan acknowledging the frank dialogue and open access given to Amnesty International by all parts of the government.

“There seems to be no sense of real urgency to bring about human rights changes on the part of some government leaders. Words have not been followed by effective action.”

“No serious efforts have been made to reform the security sector. No major investigation or prosecution has been brought against those responsible for state-sponsored political violence in recent years. Some elements of ZANU-PF still see the use of violence as a legitimate tool to crush political opponents.

“The combination of these factors could again generate grave human rights abuses in the lead up to future elections.”

Amnesty International’s assessment shows:

- Human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers continue to be intimidated, harassed, threatened, arrested and charged.
- Prosecutions continue against 15 political activists and human rights defenders abducted last year and against a number of Parliamentarians.
- Seven MDC activists who were subject to “enforced disappearances” in 2008 remain untraced. Although Home Affairs Ministers assured Amnesty International that they were not in police custody, they admitted they had not been able to find out what happened to them.
- The right to protest continues to be severely restricted. As recently as yesterday, a number of WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe Arise) activists were beaten by the police and seven were arrested for carrying out peaceful demonstrations.
- Farm invasions persist, with violence affecting both farmers and farm workers.
- Four years on, most of the victims of forced evictions during Operation Murambatsvina remain without adequate housing and redress.
- There is a grave crisis in education.

“For the climate of intimidation to end President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai must make public statements clearly instructing all party activists to stop harassment, intimidation, and threats against perceived political opponents, including teachers and lawyers,” said Irene Khan.

As head of state, commander in chief of the armed forces and leader of the country for the last three decades, President Mugabe and those around him have a special responsibility to rise to the challenge of delivering on the GPA and particularly on the hard core human rights issues.

Despite the pledge in the GPA to bring all perpetrators of political violence to justice, senior ministers confirmed that addressing impunity is not a priority for the government right now.

“The tolerance of impunity is being seen as a license for further violations by perpetrators – whether police, security officials or political party activists,” said Irene Khan.

“The government’s blatant disregard of impunity is in sharp contrast to the demand for justice, redress and reparations from the victims and survivors of violence I met throughout Zimbabwe.

“Without justice there can be no real healing in a country polarized by political violence that goes back several decades. Neither national healing nor security sector reform can succeed without addressing impunity.”

Amnesty International said that they received no clear indication from the government as to whether, how or when institutional reform – particularly of the security sector – will take place.

“Whenever we raised the issue of human rights change, the government answered that it needed more resources,” said Irene Khan. “Ending attacks on human rights defenders, lifting restrictions on the media, and allowing public protests do not require more money – they only require political will.”

Amnesty International called for strengthening the voice of civil society which is critical in the absence of a Parliamentary opposition. The organization also called for the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression to be guaranteed.

“No meaningful debate can take place without freeing the media. Both national and international media should be allowed to operate freely. This would require neither additional money nor new laws.”

Although Amnesty International’s assessment of the human rights situation is grim, the organization said that the establishment of the Inclusive Government and the GPA have changed the political dynamic – and this is something that can and must be built upon both nationally and internationally.

“Divisions between African and Western governments have not helped to create a common understanding of the human rights problems in Zimbabwe,” said Irene Khan calling on the international community to overcome its polarization and support the Zimbabwean government to achieve its human rights goals. She also called on them to set common criteria for supporting and measuring the human rights performance of the government. Amnesty International called on President Zuma of South Africa, as Chair of SADC, to provide leadership.

The organization also called on the Zimbabwean government and the donor community to expand its humanitarian assistance and focus on primary education, saying that all primary school fees and levies must be abolished.

“Because of their inability to pay fees, parents are being forced to make impossible choices – between feeding their children or education them; between sending their son or their daughter to school,” said Irene Khan. “The children of Zimbabwe are paying too high a price for the political failure of their government.”

“Progress on human rights has been woefully slow. The people of Zimbabwe can no longer continue to be held hostage to the ambitions of their leaders.”

“The polarization that exists within Zimbabwean politics is mirrored in the polarization in the international community towards Zimbabwe and that is reducing the impact of external pressure on the country,” said Irene Khan.

“The international community must work together to develop a common human rights strategy on Zimbabwe and support the Zimbabwean government to deliver it.”

Notes to editors:

- This was the first-ever visit by an Amnesty International Secretary General to the Zimbabwe, though the organization has been monitoring human rights in the country since the 1960s.
- Irene Khan will meet with Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in London on Monday 22 June.
- To download images of Irene Khan's visit to Zimbabwe, please go to:  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/kate\\_mf/sets/72157619885310400/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/kate_mf/sets/72157619885310400/)
- Irene Khan met with the following government representatives:

Vice- President Joice Mujuru, Minister of Defence Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, Minister of Education David Coltart, Minister of State in the President's Office Didymus Mutasa, Deputy Minister of Justice Jessie Majome, Minister of Home Affairs Kembo Mohadi, Minister of Home Affairs Giles Mutsekwa, Minister of State (National Healing) Sekai Holland, Speaker of the House of Assembly Lovemore Moyo. The delegation met with Minister of Housing Fidelis Mhashu.

To arrange an interview, get high resolution images or B-roll, please contact Eliane Drakopoulos on + 44 7778 472 109 or Judit Arenas on + 44 7778 472 188.