



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



19 December 2005 No. 5

ZIMBABWE

Background

On 19 May 2005 the Zimbabwean government launched Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order) to “enforce by-laws,” remove criminal elements from the cities and return people to their “rural origins.” The operation employed the police force and army in a programme of evictions and demolitions of unauthorised housing, together with actions against informal traders, throughout Zimbabwe’s urban areas. Of the population of approximately 12.7 million people, the UN estimated that the operation had rendered 570,000 people homeless, deprived 98,000 people of their direct livelihood and directly or indirectly affected 2.4 million people. The corresponding government reconstruction initiative, Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle (Live Well), has constructed only 5,000 houses since it was launched on 9 July 2005. Some of the displaced are now returning to re-establish their informal settlements in the urban areas.

The evictions and displacements took place in the context of high political polarisation in Zimbabwe following the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as an opposition political party in 1999 and the subsequent statutory limitations on freedoms of expression, assembly, movement and association, including restrictions on the press. It has been noted that the urban poor tend to support the MDC opposition rather than President Robert Mugabe and his Zanu-PF party. The MDC won all urban seats in Harare and Bulawayo in the 2000 parliamentary elections, and again won most of the urban seats in the controversial March 2005 poll. Zimbabwe has further suffered prolonged political violence and humanitarian and economic crises, including high levels of inflation, extreme unemployment, food and fuel shortages, a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and high levels of displacement following the “fast track” land reform programme that the government began in 2000.

On 20 June 2005 the Secretary-General, acting on an agreement with President Mugabe, appointed Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, the Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), as a special envoy to investigate the extent and impact of the evictions and the capacity of the government and the humanitarian community to respond to them. The special envoy delivered her report on 22 July, alleging the Zimbabwean government’s “indifference to human suffering” and disregard of “several provisions of national and international legal frameworks.” Her report made a number of recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe, several of which involved the assistance of the UN.

On 26 July, Australia, Canada and New Zealand addressed a letter to the President of the Council emphasising the special envoy’s finding of “the failure of the Government of Zimbabwe to protect its people,” stressing “the linkage between humanitarian and human rights crises and peace and

security,” and calling for the Security Council “to be seized of the situation as a matter of urgency and to engage actively with the Government of Zimbabwe to bring an end to this situation.”

The following day, the Security Council convened in a private meeting on Zimbabwe under Rule 48 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure. Although private, the meeting was an official meeting of the Council, as opposed to the unofficial “informal consultations,” which are always closed. This was unusual in several respects. As opposition by some members of the Council had prevented the members from being briefed by the special envoy in informal consultations, the meeting had been called as a formal meeting, without the customary informal agreement of all members, through formal letters from the United Kingdom to the President (S/2005/485 and S/2005/489). However, various understandings were apparently recorded in advance—in particular that the meeting would be in private, that the Ambassador of Zimbabwe would be invited to participate and that at the outset there would be a vote on the adoption of the agenda, an extremely rare event in the Council.

The agenda was approved by the necessary vote of nine members. Brazil abstained and China, Russia, Tanzania, Benin and Algeria opposed the briefing (permanent members enjoy no veto on procedural matters). Although there is no public record of the discussion, it is clear that opponents saw the humanitarian crisis as a domestic matter which should not be considered to fall within the Council’s mandate. Nevertheless, a majority of the Council considered that the humanitarian crisis justified hearing the recommendations of the special envoy.

The briefing of the special envoy, who answered questions put to her, was followed by a statement by the representative of Zimbabwe. As the meeting was held in private, no verbatim record was issued. Nevertheless, in accordance with Rule 55 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure, a communiqué regarding the meeting (S/PV.5237) was issued through the Secretary-General.

In early December, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland conducted a mission to Zimbabwe. Egeland negotiated UN involvement in the construction of temporary and permanent shelters for those left homeless. He also spoke about the eviction campaign in public. In a press briefing on 8 December he described the situation as “extremely serious and... worsening as we speak.” Hours later, in a televised speech at the opening of the annual conference of his party, President Mugabe called Egeland “a damn hypocrite and a liar,” and accused Egeland of raising political rather than humanitarian matters.

UN Documents

Letters

- S/2005/490 (26 July 2005) Letter from the Permanent Representatives of Australia, Canada and New Zealand to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Council.
- S/2005/489 (26 July 2005) Letter from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Council.
- S/2005/485 (26 July 2005) Letter from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Council.

Other

- S/2005/504 (25 October 2005) Security Council President's Monthly Assessment for the Presidency of Greece, July 2005.
- S/PV.5237 (27 July 2005) Communiqué of the Secretary-General regarding the 5237th (closed) meeting of the Security Council
- *Report of the Fact-Finding Missions to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina* (22 July 2005) by U.N. Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka
(<http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/ZimbabweReport.pdf>)

Historical Chronology

3–7 December 2005 Mission of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland traveled to Zimbabwe.

26 November 2005 Senate elections were held. Zanu-PF won 86% of elected seats and acquired 89% of all seats.

27 July 2005 The Security Council was briefed by the Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe in a private meeting.

26 June – 8 July 2005 UN Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, visited Zimbabwe

19 May 2005 Operation Murambatsvina was launched.

31 March 2005 Parliamentary elections. Zanu-PF won 65% of elected seats and acquired 72% of all seats.

March 2002 President Robert Mugabe was re-elected to a six-year presidential term.

July 2000 "Fast track" land reforms began.

June 2000 Parliamentary elections were held. Zanu-PF won 51.6% and the MDC won 47.5% of the elected seats.

February 2000 Proposed constitutional amendments increasing presidential powers were rejected in a public referendum.

September 1999 The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a political party rooted in the Zimbabwean labour movement and drawing significant support from urban areas, was formed to challenge the ruling Zanu-PF party of President Mugabe.

Useful Additional Sources

- Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org>)
- International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org>)
- Institute for Security Studies (<http://www.issafrica.org>)
- Research Paper of the United Kingdom House of Commons:
"Zimbabwe after the 2005 General Election"
(<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2005/rp05-058.pdf>)

Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations
(http://un.cti.depaul.edu/cgi-bin/spider.py?_request=0&country=Zimbabwe)

Zimbabwe Government Online
(www.gta.gov.zw) *note: this link not working as of 12/12/05*
