

Joint Statement

23 June 2005

Amnesty International, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights

Noting with grave concern the deepening humanitarian and human rights crisis in Zimbabwe, more than 200 African and international human rights and civic groups have come together to call on the African Union and the United Nations to take action

Over the past four weeks the Government of Zimbabwe has orchestrated the widespread forced eviction of tens of thousands of informal traders and families living in informal settlements. During these forced evictions homes have been burnt and property destroyed. Many individuals have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, fined, abducted and/or beaten. Such actions continue unabated, and with impunity.

Tens of thousands of people are now living in the open - during winter - without access to adequate shelter, food or clean water. No care has been shown for these people, many of whom are vulnerable. Thousands of children, the elderly and the ill face the prospect of disease and in some cases death from hunger, exposure and drinking unsafe water. Some of the most vulnerable are dying already.

The complete and wholesale destruction of people's homes and livelihoods – conservatively estimated to have affected at least 300,000 people so far – constitutes a grave violation of international human rights law, and a disturbing affront to human dignity. There can be no justification for the Government of Zimbabwe's action which has been carried out without prior notice, due process of the law or assurance of adequate alternative accommodation. We condemn it in the strongest terms.

The African Union (AU) and the relevant bodies of the United Nations (UN), including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Security Council and the Secretary-General, cannot fail to act in the face of such gross and widespread human rights violations and appalling human misery. We urge the Chair of the AU and all member states to address the situation in Zimbabwe as an urgent matter at the forthcoming AU Assembly in Libya from 4 to 5 July. Similarly, the UN must act on the serious concerns raised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing in respect of the ongoing and massive violations of human rights in Zimbabwe.

We welcome the appointment by the UN Secretary-General of Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, as the Special Envoy for Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe. We strongly urge the UN to ensure there is no delay in either her visit to Zimbabwe or the publication of her findings. Furthermore, in light of the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the fact that forced evictions continue, the UN must call for an end to these violations and for humanitarian assistance to be provided to all those affected.

We urge all member states of the AU and UN to ensure that the relevant bodies of the two organizations:

- Take immediate and effective action – consistent with their mandates – to ensure an end to the mass forced evictions and destruction of livelihoods in Zimbabwe, including by publicly condemning these violations and calling for their immediate end.
- Call for the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure that all those who are currently homeless as a result of the mass forced evictions have immediate access to emergency relief.
- Call for the Government of Zimbabwe to respect the right to an effective remedy for all victims including access to justice, and appropriate reparations which can involve restitution, rehabilitation, compensation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.