

1 Social, Economic and Political Context of “Operation Murambatsvina” (Operation Restore Order)

1.1 Introduction

On 19 May 2005, with little or no warning, a military-style “clean-up” operation started in the Zimbabwe capital, Harare. It quickly developed into a deliberate nationwide campaign, destroying what the Government termed illegal vending sites, structures, other informal business premises and homes, literally displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Termed “Operation Murambatsvina” by the Government (hereafter referred to as Operation Restore Order), and commonly referred to by the people as “Operation Tsunami”, the army and police were mobilised to carry out the demolitions and evictions.

1.2 Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order)

The first official announcement that a comprehensive “operation” was underway in Zimbabwe, came in a speech by the Chairperson of the Government-appointed Harare Commission, Ms. Sekesai Makwavarara, on 19 May 2005 at the Harare Town House.¹ She characterized it as “a programme to enforce bylaws to stop all forms of illegal activity”, and said it would be enforced “in conjunction with Zimbabwe Republican Police (ZRP).” Five days later, the City of Harare issued a notice, indicating to the people in the Greater Harare area that persons who had erected illegal structures should demolish them by 20 June 2005. There is no evidence that advance notice was given in other cities in Zimbabwe to which the Operation was extended.

One day prior to this speech, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Dr. Gideon Gono, had announced his *Post Election and Drought Mitigation Monetary Policy Statement*. In it he outlined structural and operational deficiencies of the financial system. Reference was made to the various forms of corruption and indiscipline in the economy and the need for the reorientation of the law enforcement systems in fighting such challenges.² There has been speculation as to the timing of the speech, and the Governor’s role in triggering the operation.³

On 25 May, only a few days after the notice appeared, and in complete disregard of the deadline announced, a massive military style operation started in Harare, Bulawayo and other cities, targeting first and foremost vendors’ markets, flea markets, other informal market premises and “illegal” housing structures. Twenty thousand vendors countrywide were reported arrested within a week of the operation. The operation involved the destruction of flea markets and housing used for many years by informal traders and vendors. It also involved the bulldozing, smashing and burning of structures housing many thousands of poor urban dwellers.

Eyewitnesses said the police beat some people who offered resistance, or who did not demolish their houses quickly enough.⁴ Throughout the month of June the operation targeted practically

¹ Entire text of the speech was published in *The Herald* on 28 May 2005 and is attached to this report as Annex 3 of Section A.

² “*Perspectives on the Ills of Corruption*” Supplement 4 of 5 to the *January-April 2005 Monetary Policy Review Statement Delivered by the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Dr. G. Gono (May 2005)*

³ In his meeting with the Special Envoy, the Governor claimed, however, that it was mere coincidence and that he had absolutely no idea about Operation Restore Order.

⁴ “*Order out of Chaos, or Chaos out of Order? A Preliminary Report on Operation Murambatsvina*” a report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, June 2005.

every town and business centre in the country, as well as countless homes, leaving a trail of destruction in Bulawayo, Chinhoyi, Gweru, Harare, Kadoma, Kwe Kwe, Marondera, Mutare, Rusape and Victoria Falls. The destruction and demolition first targeted so-called shanty towns in high-density suburbs and informal vending and manufacturing operations. It was then extended to settlements on farms in peri-urban and rural areas. More than 52 sites were affected and practically no area designated as 'urban' was spared.

The most devastating and immediate effect of this operation was the fact that hundreds of thousands of people were rendered homeless and left without any viable form of livelihood. People were told to return to their 'rural origins', but many simply did not have a rural home to go back to. Civil society and humanitarian agencies tried to reach people who had been affected to protect and assist them. They were denied full access by the police.⁵

Zimbabwean churches were among the first to publicly voice their concern.⁶ The National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations issued a statement on 5 June calling on the Government "to stop the Operation immediately until alternative mechanisms are put in place". As the human suffering continued unabated, international pressure against the Government increased. The Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights on the Right to Adequate Housing, Dr. Miloon Kothari, issued a statement on 3 June urging the Government "to immediately halt the mass forced evictions". The European Union also issued a statement on 7 June condemning government actions. The timing and magnitude of the operation had led to much speculation, and a need emerged for more information to obtain a clearer picture of the situation in Zimbabwe.

It was against this background that in early June the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the President of Zimbabwe, Mr. Robert Mugabe, decided that the Secretary-General should send an expert on human settlement issues to Zimbabwe for a first-hand review of the circumstances surrounding the operation. UN-HABITAT's Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, was appointed on 20 June 2005 as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, to lead a fact-finding mission to the country.

1.3 Scope of the Fact-finding Mission

The fact-finding mission comprised of experts in human settlements issues, humanitarian affairs, legal affairs, political affairs and the media. The mission was supported by the Resident Coordinator and by the UN Country Team. The mission visited Zimbabwe from 25 June to 8 July 2005. Against a backdrop of growing concerns by the international community for the violation of human rights and for the human suffering caused by the Operation, the terms of reference for the mission included: (i) assessment of the scope and extent of the recent mass evictions, the humanitarian needs and the impact on the affected population; (ii) assessment of the adequacy of the Government's arrangements for the displaced and its capacity to address the basic needs of the affected population; (iii) assessment of the capacity of the humanitarian community to

⁵ The mission was not able to ascertain on whose orders the police were acting.

⁶ On 30 May, the Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference issued a press statement noting 'with great concern' the clean-up operation and called upon the Government to "engage in a war against poverty and not a war against the poor". On 2 June the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference General Secretariat issued a press statement warning "the perpetrators of this crime that history will hold ... individually accountable".

respond; and (iv) the preparation of a comprehensive report to the Secretary-General on the situation with recommendations on how the condition of those affected may be addressed.⁷

The mission had unimpeded access and freedom of movement and received good cooperation on all fronts from the Government of Zimbabwe. The Special Envoy consulted widely with Government officials, including President Mugabe, Ministers, Ministers of State, Governors of four Provinces and four Mayors, as well as the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. She met with senior political party representatives, including some members of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party’s Politburo and Central Committee, as well as members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).⁸ The mission also consulted widely with civil society organizations in Harare, Headland, Rusape, Mutare, Gweru, Bulawayo, Hwange and Victoria Falls. The Special Envoy also met with various religious leaders and other individual Zimbabweans, including evictees, as well as the wider diplomatic community and international and national NGO’s. She held group consultations with African Ambassadors on the one hand, and with Ambassadors of donor countries and Heads of bilateral aid agency missions in Harare on the other. In addition, mission members were able to conduct in-depth consultations with a cross-section of personalities and organizations, including Government authorities, as well as representatives of the private sector and trade unions.⁹

The mission formally started on the same day as the Government paper, *The Herald*, announced that the clean-up operation was “winding up”.¹⁰ However, a few days later the Special Envoy and mission members witnessed the ongoing destruction of houses and structures in at least two locations, Porta Farm near Harare, and Luveve in Bulawayo. The mission visited the Caledonia ‘transit camp’ for those displaced near Harare, run by a special unit of the police and currently holding an estimated 5,000 displaced people.¹¹ It was clear that the Operation was not over by the day the Special Envoy and her team left Zimbabwe on 9 July, seven weeks after it had started.

1.4 Historical, Socio-economic Context

The social, economic and political circumstances in which the Operation took place were first and foremost specific to Zimbabwe. They share, however, many common and similar aspects with historical and present trends that characterise the rapid and chaotic urbanisation occurring in many African countries and cities.¹³ The following chapters provide a brief overview and analysis of the likely causal factors and context leading up to the Operation and their implications in terms of addressing the humanitarian crisis in the short-term and to forge enlightened policies and programmes to bring Zimbabwe, and its afflicted human settlements, sustainable relief and reconstruction in the medium and long-term.

1.4.1 The Historical Context

⁷ Terms of Reference of this mission are attached to this report as Annex 1.

⁸ The Special Envoy met the following members of the MDC: Hon. Gift Chimaniro, MP for Mbare, Harare; Hon. Trudy Stevenson, MP for Harare North; Hon. Thokozani Khupe, MP for Makokoba, Bulawayo; and Hon. Paurina Mtshirwa, MP for Mufakose, Harare. The leader of the MDC Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai was not in the country throughout the duration of the mission.

⁹ A complete list of persons and groups consulted cannot be attached on grounds of confidentiality.

¹⁰ *Herald* 26 June 2005.

¹¹ A description of the implementation of Operation Murambatsvina, as seen by the local press, is given in the Annex 2 of Section A. The annex provides an insight into the scope and pace of the Operation’s implementation, as well as of the reaction to the visit of the Special Envoy and her mission team.

¹³ *In our Common Interest*, Report of the Commission for Africa, March 2005 page 227

While Zimbabwe entered independence in 1980 with promises for peace and prosperity, enlightened by President Mugabe's policy of reconciliation, several underlying and unresolved issues became the root causes of future conflicts and, arguably, laid the grounds for the circumstances which allowed for a disastrous clean-up operation to take place. Among such causes one could list the failure to meaningfully address the land question and governance problems.

Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has been governed by ZANU-PF. Zimbabwean nationalism was forged in opposition to colonialism, and socialism became the basis of party ideology (though not necessarily of the economy) in the years following independence. The ruling party attempted, but failed, to introduce a one-party political system in the late 1980s. However, it maintained a highly centralised style of governance in which dissent and political opposition were hardly tolerated. The historical relationship of ZANU-PF and the minority party Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU-PF) during the liberation struggle and the subsequent civil war formed the basis of the ZANU-PF's policy and attitude towards political opposition¹⁴.

While the Government successfully provided social services such as education, health care, higher wages and better working conditions to the black majority during the early years of independence, underlying socio-political and economic problems were left unresolved that would eventually produce a national crisis. Of these, the land question was the most profound, as the liberation war was fought over land and the promise to return it to the indigenous African population. Historical inequity was embedded in the constitutional settlement (the 'Lancaster House Constitution') that preserved the colonial settler pattern of white ownership of most of the fertile land and, despite legislation in 1992 to address the inequities, the process of redistributing land remained slow and did not produce equitable results for the majority population. Some of the reasons for this failure included ineffectiveness of the willing-seller willing-buyer policy stipulated in the 'Lancaster House Constitution', as well as non-availability of funding.

With respect to the funding issue, some in the Zimbabwe political elite and intelligentsia, as well as others of similar persuasion around the continent, believe that the international community is concerned more with "regime change" and that there is no real and genuine concern for the welfare of ordinary people. They cite the fact that, following independence, many donors who pledged resources for the reconstruction of the country at the Zimbabwe Conference on Reconstruction and Development (ZIMCORD) held in 1981 did not honour their pledges. To the minds of many Zimbabweans, the international community did this because the 'wrong party' had won the elections at independence. Over the years, when Zimbabwe appealed for funds to buy land from white farmers, on a willing-seller willing-buyer basis, the international community is considered to have turned a deaf ear. Even when it was apparent that the African communal areas (former tribal trust lands) were congested and no longer able to sustain the increasing population. Western countries did not provide the necessary funds, even where these had been promised, as in the case of UK.¹⁵

Subsequently, a draft constitution that finally proposed compulsory acquisition of land without compensation, was rejected in a referendum in 2000. Spontaneous commercial farm invasions by peasants had started in February 1998, followed by violent invasions in some parts of the country.

¹⁴ Shortly after independence, Zimbabwe entered into a protracted civil war (1982 and 1987) including a brutal military campaign in Matebeleland, Gukurahundi, which claimed the lives of some 20,000 people. The repression was mainly against the minority Ndebele population which also became a strong basis for the opposition Patriotic Front of the Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union (PF-ZAPU). A unity accord was signed between ZANU-PF and ZAPU in 1987, cementing the basis of a strong dominant party system.

¹⁵ Confidential submission by a Professor from the University of Zimbabwe.

This mounting pressure forced the Government to initiate its “fast-track land reform programme” in 2000.¹⁶

The institutional framework of governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe retained structures, laws and an “elite” attitude and culture used during colonial times despite the liberation from minority rule in 1980.¹⁷ The nationalist elite seemed to have perpetuated the colonial mentality of high standards for a few at the expense of the majority. In the end, while the liberation struggle was against the ‘white settlers’ and the economic and political power they monopolized, the Government was not able to reverse the unequal and exploitative nature of colonial capitalism itself¹⁸.

1.4.2 The Economic Crisis

The background to the current economic crisis has several aspects: the inherited ‘colonial economy’ of Rhodesia, the post-independence Economic Structural Adjustment Period (ESAP) of the early 1990s, and the result of the economic policies undertaken since. By Sub-Saharan African standards Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 inherited a relatively sophisticated and diversified economy, but it already suffered from a large fiscal deficit, low economic performance, high unemployment, price controls, and a lack of foreign currency¹⁹. Many analysts point to the failure of ESAP in the early 1990s as a major negative economic turning point. The austerity measures imposed by the ESAP led to, inter alia, the massive retrenchment of skilled and unskilled labour and of the civil service; the closure of many manufacturing industries; general price increases; and the deterioration of social services. These factors, combined with the liberalisation of the economy, led to the gradual but systematic decline of the formal economy and to the growth and emergence of the informal sector, especially in the rapidly growing towns and cities of Zimbabwe.

Three political factors deepened the economic crisis in the late 1990s. First the appeasement policy towards war veterans adopted in 1997 when the Government decided to issue cash handouts to ex-combatants who had threatened to destabilize the government with a public display of discontent at the time. The handout sparked an inflationary spiral from which the economy has still to recover²⁰. Secondly, Zimbabwe’s military intervention in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo had serious consequences in terms of budgetary allocations and deficits. Thirdly, the ‘Fast Track’ land distribution programme of 2000 negatively affected agricultural production, the mainstay of the Zimbabwean economy. It prompted the imposition of targeted sanctions from the European Union, the US and several Commonwealth countries.²¹ While these sanctions were not directed against the economy *per se*, they contributed to the polarization of national and international media and the domestic political environment and also led to negative travel advisories that heavily affected the tourism industry. The Zimbabwean

¹⁶ The invasions were mainly led by war veterans but also by peasants from the largely communal lands and unemployed city residents (Report of UNDP Mission to Zimbabwe, October, 2000)

¹⁷ Submission by Deprese T. Muchena

¹⁸ Ibbo Mandaza, Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986. Codesria, Dakar Senegal.

¹⁹ Zimbabwe’s economy was also heavily subsidised (mainly by South Africa) during the Smith regime that was under economic sanctions. It led to a relatively self-sufficient economy, which after independence and liberalisation of the economy and loss of subsidy, became unsustainable.

²⁰ The cash hand-outs in 1997 are often attributed to have kicked off the downward spiral of the economy, as the Zimbabwe dollar fell from 1:10 to 1:27 in the same year. Today, the official exchange rate is 1:10,000 (and 1:23000 in the parallel market).

²¹ These were imposed on select members of the Government and ZANU-PF members, banning them from travelling to and freezing assets in these countries.

economy has been on a downward spiral since, registering a growth rate of 0.9% in 1998, declining to 0.5% in 1999, and negative growth rates since 2000-2001.

There were no “real” economic solutions in sight at the start of 2005, despite the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe declaring an imminent turn-around of the economy. The recent IMF mission, under Article IV of the consultation framework, has indicated that the economy is likely to decline by a further 7% this year (2005), that inflation, currently running at about 140%, would not be arrested to any significant levels, and that foreign currency reserves were down to three days. Foreign exchange shortages have restricted essential imports needed for industrial and agricultural production, fuel, energy and basic commodities, further exacerbating the decline of the formal economy and the Government’s revenue base. The budget deficit is estimated to exceed 14% of GDP and domestic debt is estimated at USD 1 billion. Unemployment currently stands at 75% with over 70 % of the population living under the poverty line. Zimbabwe also has one of the highest divides in Africa both in terms of access to resources and in consumption with about 80% of the population sharing less than 20% of national wealth.²² Food shortage exacerbated by drought affecting the entire sub-region has been an additional challenge faced by the country since 2001-2002, particularly in the rural areas, leading to a humanitarian crisis²³. The food deficit is estimated at 1.2 MT of maize for the 2005-6 season.

1.4.3 Rise of the Informal Economy

In 1980 the informal economy was relatively small, accounting for less than 10% of the labour force. This was attributed to the various laws and bylaws that prohibited the free movement of indigenous people, especially from rural to urban areas. With deregulation after independence and economic stagnation and decline, the informal sector share of employment grew to 20% by 1986/87, 27% by 1991 and an estimated 40% by 2004. The informal economy had effectively become the mainstay for the majority of the Zimbabweans. ILO reported in June 2005²⁴ that 3 to 4 million Zimbabweans earned their living through informal sector employment, supporting another 5 million people, while the formal sector employed about 1.3 million people. Most local authorities derive substantial revenues from fees levied from informal sector activities.²⁵

1.5 The Political Context

Against this backdrop of a deeply weakened economy is a country faced with a series of challenges in the political, legal and social areas.

Zimbabwe had been ruled by one political party for 20 years before a real opposition could emerge²⁶. The country has been led by a Founding President, a towering and influential political personality, viewed with respect in Zimbabwe and in all of Africa for his historical role in the colonial liberation struggle. A combination of this reverence and the inherited colonial administrative structures contributed to a heavily centralised Government in Zimbabwe and also

²² SADC Human Development Report (1999)

²³ WFP, Hunger in Africa, A report to the Security Council in 2005

²⁴: cited in *the Zimbabwean* (24-30 June 2005, p.8)

²⁵ For instance, Bulawayo City Council was receiving US \$75,000 from vendors. (*Source: submission from Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, 28 June 2005*)

²⁶ More than 12 opposition parties were formed in the early 1990s but remained weak and small, poorly led and having almost no political impact.

partially explains the common attitudes of regional leaders who have opted for quiet diplomacy rather than criticize his Government openly.²⁷

During the 1990s, a number of civil society organizations, especially the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), emerged as pressure groups to oppose the dominant rule of ZANU-PF, challenging emerging corruption, human rights violations and poor governance in general. This political space for civil society also allowed for the emergence of strong leadership²⁸ that ultimately led to a powerful alliance of forces that mobilized Zimbabwe's public opinion. By the time the Government tabled a draft constitution for a popular referendum in 2000, which, among other things, proposed to strengthen presidential powers and to allow the government to expropriate white commercial farmland without compensation, a segment of civil society organizations were successfully mobilised to vote against the constitutional draft²⁹.

Against the foregoing, the 2000 referendum marked the first political defeat for the leadership of ZANU-PF and became a watershed year in Zimbabwe's political history. It prompted a fierce campaign for the legislative elections in June that year. As ZANU-PF was fighting for its political life, the campaign period provided the perfect opportunity for the war veterans to consolidate their interests in order to augment their political power. It was in this charged political context that land reform became a tool for economic redistribution and political mobilisation. The 'fast-track land reform programme' became an integral part of the campaign process. Many people, including the MDC were supportive of the land acquisition and redistribution exercise. It was, however, expected that the Government would ensure an orderly and fair process, free of corruption³⁰. Yet, as a pay-off for their electioneering role, the war

²⁷ President Mugabe is part of that exclusive club of African statesmen, including the likes of Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Samora Machel etc who fought colonialism and racial discrimination. A long serving member on the OAU Liberation Committee informed that President Mugabe's own contribution to South Africa's independence is especially important. Apparently, had it not been for South Africa's liberation, land acquisition might have come much earlier in Zimbabwe and independently of MDC politics. However, President Nyerere of Tanzania is reported to have prevailed over this issue, arguing that "a forced land take over in Zimbabwe would forever jeopardize the South African liberation project and that Zimbabweans must wait before they could get back their land". With Nelson Mandela free, South Africa out of Apartheid and with promised donor assistance to buy back the land not forthcoming, a forced acquisition of land in Zimbabwe was inevitable.

²⁸ Morgan Tsvangirai was then Secretary-General of the ZCTU.

²⁹ There are conflicting views on the constitutional process. At least 2 independent scholars maintained NGOs are believed to be "Donor stooges" because of their rejection of the 2000 draft constitution. It claims, the constitutional process had involved nation-wide consultations, including with NGOs, which had more or less endorsed the contents of the draft constitution until the President, when the draft finally reached him, realizing that it was completely silent on the land question, decided to introduce "the land acquisition without compensation article" himself. They further submitted that it was the rejection of the 2000 draft constitution that kept President Mugabe in office. This view claimed that of the two, Joshua Nkomo, Zimbabwe's First Vice-President and former leader of ZAPU, had been especially anxious to see the land issue settled, and that at his death bed, he asked President Mugabe to promise him that he would not leave office before solving the land question. Following the rejection of the referendum, the President, infuriated by the rejection of the 2000 draft constitution which, in his view, would have launched the final stage of his 'independence mission', announced that the Government would still expropriate land without compensation. This would eventually become the 'fast-track land re-distribution programme', which legalized land acquisition by the state with compensation only for improvements on to the land. The opposing view obtained was that the President had deliberately launched a constitutional review exercise knowing that it would not be approved in the timeframe given thus paving the way to create a crisis and re-run for re-election. None of this could be confirmed.

³⁰ In the end, the major beneficiaries turned out to be senior ruling party officials, ministers and their families. A number of these are not using land intensively if at all, and there have been concerns that it is a virtual return to the "feudal system".

veterans were promised ownership of 20% of the land taken over by the state in the period 2000-2002.³¹ The war veterans had become an important (but disgruntled) interest group and became key players in this campaign, mobilised by ZANU-PF as ‘political shock troops’ on a large scale. The systematic use of intimidation and violence against opposition candidates and supporters became the modus operandi, particularly in commercial farming and communal areas, effectively sealing those areas off from opposition access.³²

Thus, the MDC emerged, against this background, as a formidable challenge to the ruling party. Although ZANU-PF eventually won the 2000 parliamentary elections, the process was criticised by international observers and many did not consider the elections free or fair. This period also saw increasing unemployment and urban violence, as well as an influx into towns of former employees of recently dispossessed white farmers, all of which became manifest in widespread disenchantment with the Government. Towns and cities emerged as strongholds of opposition to the ruling party and have since been viewed with suspicion by the government.

The presidential elections held two years later further polarised Zimbabwean society as well as the international community. While Western Governments considered the elections not free and fair, the African Union and SADC, considered them as representative of the will of the people. The recent legislative elections of 2005 thus followed years of increased polarisation, politically related violence and mistrust of the ruling authorities. Though election day on 31 March 2005 marked a relative calm and violence free environment, a sense of fear and distrust had prevailed over the entire population. The elections did not resolve the underlying tensions between ZANU-PF and MDC.

The 2000 and 2002 elections and the fast-track land reform programme triggered the deterioration of relations with the international donor community and the start of isolation of Zimbabwe from the wider international community. It also prompted the imposition of targeted sanctions by the European Union, the US and several Commonwealth countries.

On the regional front, the Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe’s membership in 2002 and Zimbabwe formally withdrew from the organization after a divided meeting of Heads of Government in Abuja decided to extend the suspension for another year in 2003. That year, Zimbabwe’s membership rights in the IMF were also suspended. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also shown some division on Zimbabwe, though the majority continue to openly support President Mugabe. While the African Union (AU) has not

³¹ “*Between Authoritarianism and Democracy: Politics in Zimbabwe since 1990*” Lloyd M. Sachikonye (in *Unfinished Business, The Land Crisis in Southern Africa*, ed. Margaret C. Lee and Caren Colvard, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2003)

³² “Order out of Chaos, or Chaos out of Order? A Preliminary Report on Operation “Murambatsvina”, Report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum

³⁵ At the time the fact-finding mission was in the country, the Chairperson of the AU Commission designated the Special Rapporteur Responsible for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, to carry out a fact-finding mission in Zimbabwe from 30 June to 4 July 2005. The AU Summit held soon after in Libya, however, did not discuss Zimbabwe at any open forum. Subsequently, the AU Envoy, Tom Nyanduga, a Tanzanian lawyer and diplomat, could not undertake his mission and was courteously asked to leave. It was later explained that he had arrived without clear blessing from the President of the African Union

specifically addressed the situation in Zimbabwe, a Ministerial Meeting in 2004 adopted a report critical of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe for the first time.³⁵

The context in which the clean-up operation was conducted, therefore, shows a country with a history of inequities that the national government has not been able to redress, a Government that inherited difficult structural economic problems that are difficult to solve without support by the international community. Its programme for equitable land redistribution could have been better justified by a transparent and fair redistribution of land to full-time farmers with secure tenure to safeguard investments and productivity. This is yet to happen.

1.6 The Motivations behind the Operation

Against the background described above, a number of factors have been advanced as explaining the motivation and timing of Operation Restore Order held 48 days after the general election. The Government of Zimbabwe has given the following main justifications for the Operation: arresting disorderly or chaotic urbanization, including its health consequences; stopping illegal, parallel market transactions, especially foreign currency dealing and hoarding of consumer commodities in short supply; and reversing environmental damage caused by inappropriate urban agricultural practices. From the wide range of individuals and organizations interviewed by the Special Envoy and her team, a number of other alleged motivations emerged. They believed that the Operation:

- a. was a result of general concern over increasing chaos and congestion in the central business district of Harare and other major cities over which the Government was being blamed by the middle class; nostalgia over the role of Harare as the “Sunshine City” was on the rise;
- b. was an act of retribution against areas known by the Government to have voted for the opposition during the last few presidential and parliamentary elections;
- c. could have been conceived by a number of individuals as part of the politics of succession to President Mugabe;
- d. was a means of checking the power and influence of the war veterans, or ex-combatants;
- e. was a means to increase the flow of foreign currency through the "Homelink" scheme;³⁶
- f. was a pre-emptive strategy designed to prevent popular uprising, in light of deepening food insecurity and other economic hardships;
- g. was a mechanism designed to re-possess control of the conduct of business by some political leaders in the ruling party, thus establishing a system of political patronage over urban areas
- h. was a scheme to divert the attention of the President away from his increasing concerns over the underutilization of newly acquired commercial farms in rural areas; and
- i. represented a desire on the part of some political leaders to engineer a reverse urban-to-rural migration process, on the wrong belief that this was good for Zimbabwe’s national development.

Many of the individuals holding the views above generally saw Operation Restore Order as a “smokescreen” for motives that had little to do with addressing the problem of informal structures

³⁶ “No War in Zimbabwe”, Solidarity Peace Trust November 2004. The “Home Link” scheme was devised by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to assist Zimbabweans in the Diaspora estimated at 3 million to utilize official channels to send their remittances back home thus increasing the inflow of foreign currency into the official banking system. Initially it worked very well when recipients were allowed to draw the money in foreign currency. This policy changed to local currency and the scheme could no longer attract funds as the parallel market rate was more than double what was offered by the official exchange.

and restoring order within urban areas.³⁷ Whatever the real motivations behind the Operation, it is clear that Zimbabwe, like most other African countries, is confronted by serious and mounting challenges related to rapid urbanization, including inadequate shelter and rising pressure on urban infrastructure and services. Chapter 2 of this report turns to an examination of these challenges.

³⁷ David Coltard, an MDC Member of Parliament, argued that Operation Restore Order was symptomatic of the Government of Zimbabwe's general lack of respect for the rule of law and that the Operation had breached a series of laws, including those related to housing and urban councils. He also highlighted the fact that no budgetary provisions had been made for the construction of new housing in the wake of the Operation which, in his view, showed that the Operation had neither been conceived nor planned before the parliamentary elections of March 2005, as claimed by the Government of Zimbabwe.