

1: Zimbabwe
(by Audrey Gaughran, Amnesty International)

Audrey Gaughran, having just returned from Zimbabwe, briefed on the situation in the country in relation to the Government's ongoing campaign of land resettlement/urban clean-up, the so-called Operation Murambatsvina [the subject of the recent report of the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe], which has caused mass forced evictions and demolition of houses and settlements.

The recent events are the latest in a series of crises since the 1980's, where the Government of Zimbabwe has violated human rights in complete impunity. Houses and settlements were destroyed and people were brought into various transit camps or sought refuge in churches, from where they again were forced out and scattered all over the country in seemingly random rural areas with no access to food, shelter or any other basic services. Evictions have also taken place from many rural areas.

The operation is officially to target illegal dwellings and clamp down on alleged illicit activities. But in effect many of the destroyed houses, farm plots and settlements are being given to members of the armed forces loyal to President Mugabe.

People who can prove that they have a lease agreement for a property in Harare or a job there, have been allowed to return. So many people are now back at the sites of their destroyed houses but without food or shelter. The GoZ has said that it will re-house people and start reconstruction, but nothing is happening and things seem very uncertain.

Shelter is a major concern, especially because of the winter season. Tents are a part of the Flash Appeal being drawn up, but the GoZ does not allow the establishment of tent camps. Many people have been making their way back to the transit camps and churches in hope to find food and shelter there, but little assistance is to be found, and the GoZ has closed the camps.

An overriding concern for humanitarian actors is that they are being denied access to many areas, including places where it is known that human rights violations are taking place. In this regard, there is fear that if the UN starts criticising the GoZ and President Mugabe too openly, they will be asked to leave the country.

2: Zimbabwe
(by Tiseke Kasambala, Human Rights Watch)

Continuing on the issue of human rights violations and humanitarian efforts in Zimbabwe, Tiseke Kasambale briefed participants on the outcome of a recent mission to the country.

Ms. Kasambale underlined that the issue human rights should be incorporated broadly into the whole framework of humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe. Furthermore she stressed the need for improved physical protection for the IDPs and for humanitarian agencies on the ground to raise the question. Ms. Kasambale urged that donors, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors present in Zimbabwe confront the authorities with demands of accessibility and accountability.

One of the recommendations in the report of the UN Special Envoy, is that legal measures should be domestic, but as Ms. Kasambale mentioned, there is no free objectively functioning legal system in the country. Judges are being threatened, the GoZ ignores High Court orders and there is a general lack of accountability in the system. Furthermore Ms. Kasambale mentioned that local NGOs are being harassed by the authorities, but discretely keep on providing some food assistance.

The discussion following the two briefings on Zimbabwe, focussed on the lack of access, including to local NGOs, as well as the issue of the UN and other actors to raise the question in harsher terms with the GoZ. In this regard, Ms. Kasambale pointed out, that she did not share the concerns raised about the risk for international actors to be expelled from Zimbabwe. One participant mentioned that pressure should be coming from the African Union.

3: Niger and Mauritania – mission debriefing (by Emiliene Anikpo, WHO)

Emiliene Anikpoe briefed on a WHO assessment mission to Niger and Mauritania from 27 July to 2 August. The mission was composed of 4 persons from HQ as well as members of the WHO country offices. The mission was a follow-up to a previous rapid assessment mission.

Ms. Anikpoe stressed the fact that Niger is a climalogically vulnerable country and mentioned that early warning systems to alert on looming food has long been in place and helped to prevent serious food crisis for over 20 years. From talking to people on the ground, one of the reasons for failure this time, could be that farmers in Niger had been too quick in selling their crops to neighbouring countries with increased demands.

Malnourishment is a chronic problem in Niger, especially among children from 0-5 years, and the present food crisis has dramatically increased the level. Furthermore there has been an increase in infectious diseases due to the heavy rainfalls and the crowding of people around food distribution posts as well as other factors. In this regard, Ms. Anikpoe added that WHO together with UNICEF would initiate a vaccination campaign.

In Maradi in the Southern part of the country, which, by many, is considered the epicentre of the crisis, MSF has been settled for many years and in 2002, 2003 and 2004 they treated about 500 cases of malnourishment per month. From January 2005 this figure has risen to 1000 per month, and in the last weeks they have treated over 900 cases of malnutrition per week. One of the reasons for the escalation is that MSF have begun a more intensive search for the victims adding a number of mobile centres to their operation. In this context, WHO is planning to set up health antennas all over the country to reach more people.

One of the major gaps related to the issue of health in Niger and the Sahel region as a whole, is the lack of overall country and regional data providing an image of the general health status.

Rob Holden from WHO, added to Ms. Anikpoes briefing and informed participants that WHO is increasing staff presence in Niger and has put an advisor in with the Niger Ministry of Health. Furthermore WHO is moving cholera kits to Niger planned to arrive shortly. The first health coordination meeting will be held in Niamey this afternoon (10 August) and WHO will begin issuing weekly health bulletins.

4: AOB

(by Einar Bjorgo, UNITAR-UNOSAT)

In relation to the ongoing humanitarian reform and the present work in the IASC Sectoral Working Groups, Einar Bjorgo drew to the attention of participants, the potential and current use of satellite technologies and geographic information systems for humanitarian response and stressed the necessity of introducing a technology component in the current reform dialogue. Mr. Bjorgo stressed, that to contribute to the work of the Sectoral Working Groups before they end their initial work on 22 August, UNOSAT/UNITAR would be very interested in establishing contact with the chairs of the Sectoral Working Groups.

Action: IASC Secretariat to convey the message of UNITAR-UNOSAT to chairs of the IASC Sectoral Working Groups.

5: IASC Standard Briefing

(by Marilena Viviani, IASC Secretariat)

- Tomorrow the IASC Inter-Sectoral Working Groups Meeting will be held at 16h30 in room C.3 of the Palais des Nations.
- On 17 August, the Sub Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning will meet at WFP HQ in Rome

- In the week of 15 August an IASC meeting on the Sahel region (following decision in the IASC Meeting on Niger on 8 August) will be held. Invitations will go out shortly.

**IASC Weekly Meeting
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