Office of the
United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator
Zimbabwe

Press Release

13 May 2008

The Office the United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator on behalf of the UNCT wishes to advise that it has been receiving an increasing number of reports and requests for humanitarian assistance to people that have been affected by violence, purportedly instituted by some elements of the security forces, youth militias, war veterans and gangs of supporters of both the ZANU-PF and the MDC that have been deployed around the country in recent weeks. These reports indicate that some people have died, several hundred others have been hospitalized while many more have been displaced from their homes and some have lost property that includes livestock, their homes and belongings. These incidences of violence are occurring in the communal, farming and urban areas and there are indications that the level of violence is escalating in all these areas and could reach crisis levels. The UNCT has been presented with some evidence in support of these reports.

Further the UN humanitarian agencies and their partners in the NGO community have been experiencing limited access to the affected people due to this heightened tension and localized outbreaks of violence, resulting in them scaling down their humanitarian programmes thereby exacerbating the humanitarian situation. However the UN agencies, the International Red Cross and other humanitarian NGO's could be more effective after having undertaken their own assessment of the situation on the ground.

The UNCT is particularly concerned about this level of violence, reports of threats, intimidation, abuse and violence directed against NGOs, election monitors, human rights defenders and other representatives of civil society, and also clearly suggesting that there is an emerging pattern of political violence inflicted mainly, but not exclusively, on rural supporters of the opposition MDC party. However, there are also some reports indicating that MDC supporters are also resorting to violence and intimidation. This state of affairs is unacceptable to the UNCT.

The UNCT is deeply concerned about the number of internally displaced people that have fled their homes for fear of reprisals by party activists, without food, shelter and other basic social services. This state of affairs will lead to unprecedented humanitarian needs in the country.

The UNCT brought this information to the attention of the Government of Zimbabwe continues to engage the Government of The Republic of Zimbabwe to seek solutions to the unfolding humanitarian situation and encourages all concerned to ensure that people in need are properly assisted.

It is the primary responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe to provide protection and effective remedies to all its citizens and we welcome the reports that the authorities are intensifying the antiviolence campaign, we encourage them to continue to do so and ensure that violence is totally removed in all parts of the country. There is a legal duty to act in the event of human rights abuses and violations. The UNCT urges the Government of Zimbabwe to continue to comply with all the

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tenets and principles of the 'rule of law' in response to the violence that has engulfed some parts of the country.

We also urge the Government to set up a central clearing house which will be a safe and secure environment were victims can report cases of politically motivated violence without fear of retribution. Further, the UNCT urges all political leaders across the political divide to unequivocally renounce politically motivated violence to restrain their supporters from engaging in such activities, and also encourages all law enforcement agencies to discharge their constitutional mandate in a non-partisan and professional manner.

The UNCT would like to reiterate its commitment to work with all concerned to address the issues affecting the country so as avoid a humanitarian crisis that would emerge if the situation of violence is left unattended and unresolved. The UNCT therefore calls upon all stakeholders to actively take steps to bring to an end the ongoing violence and human rights violations and requests the Government of Zimbabwe to facilitate access to the people requiring assistance.

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