

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 409

Condemning the Government of Zimbabwe’s “Operation Murambatsvina” under which homes, businesses, religious structures, and other buildings and facilities were demolished in an effort characterized by the Government of Zimbabwe as an operation to “restore order” to the country.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 28, 2005

Mr. LANTOS (for himself, Mr. HYDE, Mr. BERMAN, Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Mr. WYNN, Mr. WOLF, Mr. WAXMAN, Mr. TANCREDO, Ms. WATSON, Mr. BURTON of Indiana, Mr. ABERCROMBIE, Mr. DOOLITTLE, Mr. WEXLER, Mr. FARR, Mr. McNULTY, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, Mr. PITTS, and Mr. JACKSON of Illinois) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on International Relations, and in addition to the Committee on Financial Services, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Condemning the Government of Zimbabwe’s “Operation Murambatsvina” under which homes, businesses, religious structures, and other buildings and facilities were demolished in an effort characterized by the Government of Zimbabwe as an operation to “restore order” to the country.

Whereas on May 19, 2005, the Government of Zimbabwe launched “Operation Murambatsvina”, translated from the Shona language as “Operation Drive Out the Trash”,

in major cities and suburbs throughout Zimbabwe in an effort that it characterized as an operation to “restore order” to the country;

Whereas hours after the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe called for an end to the parallel market, Operation Murambatsvina began in the city of Harare and subsequently in other urban areas, such as the city of Bulawayo, ostensibly to oust illegal vendors and eliminate illegal structures;

Whereas Operation Murambatsvina was carried out as an indiscriminate demolition of the homes and livelihood of thousands of Zimbabwean citizens already suffering from a protracted economic and political crisis brought on by poor policy directives by the Government of Zimbabwe that forced masses of rural dwellers to urban areas of the country for survival;

Whereas in some communities that were victimized by the forced demolitions, including Cheru Farm and Killarney Farm where more than 20,000 people lived, Zimbabweans had lived in residences for over 20 years and had well-functioning schools, health and HIV/AIDS clinics, orphanages for AIDS-affected children, viable businesses, places of worship, and other amenities;

Whereas in 1993, the Government of Zimbabwe moved families from Cheru Farms to a new location, Porto Farm, which during Operation Murambatsvina was demolished by Zimbabwean Government forces;

Whereas government security forces carried out Operation Murambatsvina, and in doing so, beat residents and forced them to destroy their own homes and places of business, though many residents provided permits from

municipal authorities granting permission to build their structures;

Whereas Operation Murambatsvina resulted in the demolition throughout the country of homes, businesses, and religious structures, including a mosque, and an AIDS orphanage and in the intimidation, harassment, and arrest of tens of thousands of people;

Whereas Operation Murambatsvina cut off many AIDS patients from anti-retroviral medicines which will likely lead to a reversal of their health, resistance to the drugs, and a more virulent form of AIDS in Zimbabwe with potential for spreading throughout the region and worldwide;

Whereas churches and private citizens sheltering the victims of Operation Murambatsvina were also intimidated, harassed, and arrested for their efforts to provide a safe haven for the victims during Zimbabwe's harsh winter;

Whereas armed soldiers and police forcibly removed hundreds of homeless people from churches in the city of Bulawayo and banned religious groups from providing humanitarian assistance to those seeking shelter at Hellensvale, a transit camp north of Zimbabwe's second city, and where police arrested and detained religious leaders;

Whereas a strongly worded statement issued by the Bulawayo clergy stated: "The removal of the poor, innocent, weak, voiceless and vulnerable members of society by riot police in the middle of the night was uncalled for and unnecessary. It is inhumane, brutal and insensitive, and in total disregard of human rights and dignity. These people are not criminals but bona fide citizens of this nation. It seems the crime they committed is that they are poor.";

Whereas the African Commission for Peoples' and Human Rights dispatched an African Union envoy, Bahame Tom Nyanduga, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Asylum Seekers in Africa to investigate the ongoing demolitions;

Whereas the Government of Zimbabwe refused to allow the African Union envoy an opportunity to conduct his mission after being accused by the Government of Zimbabwe through its government-controlled media of "following the agenda of western countries";

Whereas in response to the crisis, the Secretary-General of the United Nations dispatched a special envoy, Ms. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), on a factfinding mission to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina on the people of Zimbabwe and its consequences for the Zimbabwean Government;

Whereas the mission of the United Nations special envoy was undertaken between June 26 and July 8, 2005, where she visited the cities of Harare, Headlands, Rusape, Mutare, Gweru, Bulawayo, Hwange, and Victoria Falls and met with victims of Operation Murambatsvina, heard personal testimony from victims, and met with members of the diplomatic community, the Government of Zimbabwe, and international nongovernmental organizations;

Whereas the United Nations special envoy estimated that approximately 700,000 people in cities across the country have lost either their homes, their source of livelihood, or both, and that a total of 2.4 million people or 18 percent of the population was directly or indirectly affected by Operation Murambatsvina and that the operation would

have considerable short-term and long-term impact on social and economic conditions in the country;

Whereas 40,800 families directly affected by Operation Murambatsvina were headed by women, and 83,530 children under the age of four and 26,600 people age 60 and older were directly affected;

Whereas President Robert Mugabe described this sudden and extensive operation against thousands of families and business persons in the dead of winter as necessary “to eliminate hideouts of crime and grime”;

Whereas the United Nations special envoy is quoted as saying “the poor are not criminals . . . [t]hey work hard to obtain the little which they have and they should not thus be treated like criminals”;

Whereas the United Nations special envoy assessed the negative impact of Operation Murambatsvina on shelter, water and sanitation, food and nutrition, basic health services, HIV/AIDS, education, women and girls, refugees and other vulnerable groups;

Whereas the special envoy concluded that Operation Murambatsvina “has rendered people homeless and economically destitute on an unprecedented scale; most of the victims were already among the most economically disadvantaged groups in society; and they have now been pushed deeper into poverty and have become even more vulnerable; and the scale of suffering is immense, particularly among widows, single mothers, children, orphans, the elderly and the disabled persons”;

Whereas the rise of urbanization and the informal sector in Zimbabwe has been the direct result of failed economic policies, a bitterly disputed fast track land reform pro-

gram, unplanned cash handouts to appease war veterans, the costly military intervention in Congo, and persistent drought;

Whereas before Operation Murambatsvina, unemployment in Zimbabwe was between 70 and 80 percent, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate was 24 percent, and the inflation rate was 164.4 percent (but was as high as 522.8 percent), and currently Zimbabwe has the world's fastest shrinking economy, there is an ongoing fuel crisis in the country, and the Zimbabwean economy had contracted 7 percent; and

Whereas the staggering suffering brought on by Operation Murambatsvina has been added to the already large-scale humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That—

2 (1) it is the sense of the House of Representa-
3 tives that—

4 (A) through Operation Murambatsvina, the
5 Government of Zimbabwe has created a human-
6 itarian disaster that has compounded the al-
7 ready existing humanitarian food and economic
8 crises in the country, and the Government of
9 Zimbabwe has insufficient resources to address
10 such crises;

11 (B) the Government of Zimbabwe has a
12 duty to protect the economic, social, and polit-
13 ical rights of its citizens as guaranteed by the

1 Constitution of Zimbabwe and the African
2 Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; and

3 (C) the Government of Zimbabwe also is
4 subject to the International Covenant on Eco-
5 nomic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which
6 Zimbabwe is a party, which states in part that
7 "forced evictions are prima facie incompatible
8 with the provisions of the Covenant and can
9 only be carried out under specific cir-
10 cumstances"; and

11 (2) the House of Representatives—

12 (A) condemns Operation Murambatsvina
13 as a major humanitarian catastrophe caused by
14 the Government of Zimbabwe's callousness to-
15 ward its own people, disregard for the rule of
16 law, and lack of planning to move families and
17 businesses to more desirable locations;

18 (B) calls on the United Nations, the Afri-
19 can Commission for Peoples' and Human
20 Rights, and the African Union to continue ef-
21 forts to investigate the impact of the
22 demolitions of housing structures and premises
23 from which informal businesses operated and to
24 provide the international community with a via-
25 ble strategy to address the problems;

1 (C) calls on the Government of Zimbabwe
2 to allow international humanitarian organiza-
3 tions access to those affected by the operation
4 who are in need of food, medicine, shelter, sani-
5 tation, and water;

6 (D) calls on the Government of Zimbabwe
7 to hold accountable those responsible for this
8 egregious injury to the Zimbabwean people,
9 both the decisionmakers of the operation and
10 those who carried out the operation;

11 (E) calls on the Government of Zimbabwe
12 to immediately and aggressively implement poli-
13 tics to promote the private sector and create
14 jobs and build housing to accommodate those
15 displaced by the operation;

16 (F) calls on the United Nations and the
17 international community to stand by the people
18 of Zimbabwe who have been victimized by their
19 government in this operation and to help them
20 with relief and reconstruction of their lives; and

21 (G) calls on the President of the United
22 States to instruct the United States Executive
23 Director to the International Monetary Fund
24 (IMF) to use the voice, vote, and influence of
25 the United States to support the IMF review of

1 Zimbabwe's membership in that institution cur-
2 rently underway, and to give serious consider-
3 ation to further action at the IMF should the
4 Government of Zimbabwe continue to pursue
5 destructive economic policies, fail to make pay-
6 ments on its arrears, or block immediate emer-
7 gency humanitarian assistance from the inter-
8 national community through the World Food
9 Program and other international humanitarian
10 agencies.

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