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## **Zimbabwe's 'Cleanup' Takes a Vast Human Toll**

**By MICHAEL WINES**

HARARE, Zimbabwe, June 10 - The government abruptly began demolishing shanties and roadside markets here three weeks ago, evicting thousands of people and bulldozing homes or burning them to the ground, in what officials call a cleanup of illegal slums and black-market vendors.

But as the campaign, directed at as many as 1.5 million members of Zimbabwe's vast underclass, spreads beyond Harare, it is quickly evolving into a sweeping recasting of society, a forced uprooting of the very poorest city dwellers, who have become President Robert G. Mugabe's most hardened opponents.

By scattering them to rural areas, Mr. Mugabe, re-elected to another five-year term in 2002, seems intent on dispersing the biggest threat to his 25-year autocratic rule as poverty and unemployment approach record levels and mass hunger and the potential for unrest loom.

The United Nations estimates that the campaign, Operation Murambatsvina, using a Shona word meaning "drive out the rubbish," has so far left 200,000 people homeless and 30,000 vendors jobless. Human rights and civic leaders say the numbers could be several times that, a view that seemed plausible during a four-day visit to Harare and Bulawayo, the nation's second-largest city, and points between.

No matter the precise numbers, the campaign is clearly one of the most aggressive steps yet taken against the Zimbabwe population by a government that has in recent years met rising international condemnation for stifling its opponents.

On the road from Bulawayo to Harare, pickup trucks and rickety handcarts groan with the belongings of newly evicted families, and fires from torched flea markets flicker in the dusk. The police man roadblocks and drive trucks through slums littered with bulldozed houses looking for resistance to the ongoing purge, but there is none.

In shattered Harare-area townships like Mbare and Mabvuku, a slum of about 100,000 people 10 miles east of Harare, the homeless sit beside furniture and clothes rescued from the destruction. There and elsewhere thousands sleep in the open, on farms and urban streets, in Zimbabwe's near-freezing winter nights.

The police ransacked and burned whole blocks of vendors' stalls this week and last in Bulawayo, and razed squatter camps, slums and roadside stands last week in Victoria Falls. The campaign has spread to rural areas like Rimuka, a township 85 miles southwest of Harare, where policemen equipped with riot gear destroyed homes and stands on Tuesday.

"Some were refused the right to take out their goods," said Ignatius Magonese, 62, a Rimuku resident who was pushing his family's possessions, heaped high atop a trailer welded of rebar, down the Harare-Bulawayo highway. "They pushed them down with the house. Then they told them to pick up their things and leave. Some other older people were crying, just like saying, 'This is the end of my life. Where will I put my things? Where will I go?'"

Mr. Mugabe says the campaign is a long-overdue step to rid Zimbabwe of what he told Parliament on Thursday was "a chaotic state of affairs" in the nation's cities and towns. The street vendors being uprooted work in the black market and pay no taxes, he has said, and the shacks being demolished were built illegally on plots already occupied by registered homes that have been spared destruction.

"Our cities and towns had deteriorated to levels that were a real cause for concern," Mr. Mugabe said in a speech on May 27. Beyond their crumbling roads and overtaxed utilities, he said, urban areas "had become havens for illicit and criminal practices and activities which just could not be allowed to go on."

But by attacking the shanty dwellers and so-called informal traders, whose black-market businesses have supplanted much of the official state-dominated economy, the government also hopes to reclaim control of the foreign currency that the official economy desperately needs.

That would solidify Mr. Mugabe's authority at a time when Zimbabwe's economic and human crises seem to have eroded it. One Harare political analyst who refused to be identified for fear of retribution said: "I think they know what the country is going to look like in a few months, and they want to clear out the towns, to clear these people way out of here. It's a governing strategy, no doubt about it."

Whatever the political benefits, however, witnesses and experts say the impact on the campaign's targets is already proving catastrophic.

With no income and no homes, many families are fleeing to the countryside, where both poverty and hunger are worse even than in the cities, and jobs are nonexistent. With no black market to offer basic goods that the state-run economy has failed to provide, shortages of food and gasoline are certain to worsen.

The government has rounded up some of the newly homeless and deposited them on farms, telling them that they will be offered legal housing later. But that seems unlikely; in Harare alone, a city of 1.9 million people, the official waiting list for housing already exceeds 600,000 families, said Kingsley Kanyuchi, the chairman of the residents' association in a Harare suburb, Glen Norah.

Meanwhile, the evicted are further crowding the overstuffed homes of relatives and neighbors, or sleeping in the open. Stories of suffering and death abound.

Mr. Kanyuchi told of encountering a funeral procession last week for two children who died of exposure after being evicted. Suicides also are rising because of the "brutal" evictions, said the special rapporteur on adequate housing at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Miloon Kothari.

"It's a gross violation of human rights in terms of Zimbabwe's international obligations," Mr. Kothari said Friday in a telephone interview from Geneva. "People are desperate. They just have nowhere to go."

Interviews this week with victims of the campaign only underscored that point. In conversation after conversation, it was clear that the demolitions were being felt far beyond the residents and merchants who were the principal targets.

In Bulawayo, the police burned the stalls of hundreds of downtown vendors, many of them licensed by the city, and carted their goods away. By destroying her business, said a 41-year-old woman who had sold clothing hauled in from nearby Botswana, the police cut off all support not only for her three children, but also for six relatives in Solusi, 30 miles to the east via a dirt road.

The woman, who was afraid to be named, said she had borrowed 18 million Zimbabwe dollars, or about \$720 at the current black-market exchange rate, to open the stand and obtain the license. "This week I must pay 2 million to the bank," she said. "I don't know where I'll get it."

In Mabvuku and neighboring Tafara, Harare townships built 35 years ago to house the domestic workers of white citizens, the head of the local residents' association said most of the shacks being razed had provided rental income to the plots' owners, mostly retirees dating to the area's founding.

"Every stand has accumulated three to five families" living in outbuildings that were destroyed, said the head of the association, Joseph Rose. "There were more tenants than landlords on these properties. This area was built for low-income people, and when they retired, they didn't have pensions. So this is how they lived - from their lodgers."

The lodgers are gone now, forced by the police to tear down their own homes. "When I came home Monday from work, things had just gone crazy," said Errison Mapani, a 26-year-old security guard who had rented an outbuilding

for the last year. "I had to run to find a place at a friend's house where I could put my things." Mr. Mapani has yet to find a new place to live. He expects to quit work and move to Mutare, a rural outpost on the Mozambique border.

About 300 people were left homeless when the shacks of farm workers in Ruwa, 10 miles east of Harare, were torn down, said Matsakira Nona. Ms. Nona said that half of the displaced were ordered to leave. The rest, including her 10 children, have camped in a corner of the farm for two weeks. She once supported her children by selling tomatoes. The police have stopped that, too, she said.

The government's drive shows no sign of slowing down. The police and bulldozers have yet to reach Glen Norah, a sprawling, 35-year-old township about 15 miles south of Harare. But from a hillside there, smoke could be seen on Wednesday curling from burning vendors' stalls in Glen View, about a half-mile across a valley.

Riot police razed several Glen Norah shops last week as a warning of what residents would face.

"Just go around. People are already pulling down their roofs and buildings," Mr. Kanyuchi, the Glen Norah residents' association chairman, said of his neighbors on Wednesday. "Of every five vehicles, two are loaded with goods" of fleeing families and vendors.

Mr. Kanyuchi surveyed the township in an effort to gauge the impact of the impending destruction. He guessed that three in four of the area's 92,000 households had families living in outbuildings marked for destruction, and that most of those families - also tenants of retirees - had children in the local schools and will be forced to drop out.

Many will end up in places like Brunapeg, a middle-of-nowhere village nearly 100 miles southwest of Bulawayo, where refugees already are appearing at the mission hospital in search of food and medical help.

Brunapeg, the epicenter of a 1980's massacre in which Mr. Mugabe's army killed as many as 20,000 ethnic Ndebeles, is now the epicenter of a drought. Many people there are running out of corn meal, the staple food, and wheat, the fallback. Some are digging peanuts and foraging among wild plants for food, Pedro Porrino, a Spanish physician who works there, said in an interview in Bulawayo.

"The situation in rural areas was very bad," Dr. Porrino said. "But these days, with the situation in the towns, it's becoming even worse. We're receiving more people, and we have nothing to offer them - because we had nothing to offer the people who are already there."