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Africa's complacency on Zimbabwe mirrors another Rwanda, warns trade unionist

JOHANNESBURG - A top Zimbabwean trade unionist accused Africa of complacency in the face of a deteriorating crisis in Zimbabwe saying continental leaders will only wake up to act if the situation degenerates into a Rwandan-type genocide or the Darfur massacres.

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) women's affairs representative Thabitha Khumalo, who is in Johannesburg for talks with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) told the Press that President Robert Mugabe's controversial urban clean-up drive had shocked and numbed crisis-sapped Zimbabweans.

Close to a million people have been cast onto the streets without food, clean water or a means of livelihood after their informal businesses, backyard cottages and shanty town homes were demolished by armed police in a campaign Mugabe has defended as vital to smash crime and restore the beauty of Zimbabwe's cities.

Khumalo, whose face was blue and swollen following a violent assault allegedly by pro-Mugabe youths, said the clean-up campaign had reduced Zimbabweans to refugees in their own country.

The international community has roundly condemned the clean-up drive while the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which enjoys more support in urban areas, has said the government campaign is meant to punish city residents for backing the opposition party.

A United Nations envoy is next week expected to submit a report of her findings after a two-week mission to Zimbabwe to probe the mass evictions. A South African Council of Churches delegation that returned from Harare earlier this week, also castigated Mugabe's clean-up operation saying it was "shocked" by the untold suffering and misery brought on poor families displaced by the clean-up operation.

COSATU, which has differed with President Thabo Mbeki and his ruling African National Congress (ANC) party on their policy towards Harare, says the humanitarian crisis triggered off by Mugabe's clean-up drive was beyond the capacity of non-governmental organisations alone saying African governments should intervene.

The South African workers' union, which is in a tripartite ruling alliance led by the ANC and which includes the South African Communist Party, says the only way forward for Zimbabwe was for the formation of a broad-based government of national unity including Mugabe's party, the MDC, civil society, churches and labour. -ZimOnline