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Zimbabwe: More deaths as mass evictions continue unabated

Amnesty International has received information that at least three have died -- including a pregnant woman and a four-year-old child -- during a chaotic mass eviction at least 10,000 people from Porta Farm, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Harare established by the government more than 10 years ago.

“Over the last 48 hours, Porta Farm – a settlement of at least 10,000 people -- has been obliterated. People have watched their lives being completely destroyed – and many are now being forcibly removed in trucks by police. At the moment we are not sure where they are being taken,” said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

Some residents have resisted the attempt to forcibly remove them and have been injured in clashes with the police. Local human rights monitors report that during the attempted forced removals this morning two women -- one pregnant and the other extremely ill -- fell off the trucks into which they were being herded. A four-year-old child was reportedly run over by a truck. There are unconfirmed reports of a second child dying – circumstances are not yet clear.

Amnesty International called for an immediate halt to the mass forced evictions.

This week’s mass evictions and today’s deaths take place as United Nations Special Envoy Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka visits Zimbabwe to look at the evictions and their impact. Human rights groups in Zimbabwe have reported on the situation at Porta Farm to Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka.

An AU representative will also arrive in Zimbabwe today to carry out a fact-finding mission. Bahame Tom Nyanduga, Special Rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights responsible for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, will be in Zimbabwe between 30 June and 4 July 2005. Amnesty International welcomes this move by the AU to examine the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Zimbabwe and strongly urges the Special Rapporteur to investigate the situation at Porta Farm and to engage with civic and human rights groups as fully as possible.

“Although we welcome this visit by the AU representative and look forward to seeing his report, we are concerned that his time in Zimbabwe is very brief,” said Kolawole Olaniyan. “We urge the AU representative to see as much as possible in affected communities – and not just visit those areas designated by the government. We hope that he will have unfettered access to all areas.”

Background

The Zimbabwean government attempted to evict the residents of Porta Farm last September using tear gas and excessive force. At least 11 people died following police misuse of tear gas. Amnesty International called for a full investigation into the deaths, but none is known to have taken place.

From 1 June this year, Amnesty International members have been sending urgent communications to the Government of Zimbabwe calling for an end to the mass forced evictions and expressing concern that Porta Farm could once again be a target.

Although it is not clear where the Porta Farm residents are being taken, reports indicate that some are being transported to Caledonia Farm, which has been described as a transit camp. Amnesty believes that conditions at Caledonia Farm are extremely poor with insufficient space, shelter, water and sanitation.

Public Document

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