

Forced evictees still ignored

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HARARE, ZIMBABWE -- Amnesty International and the Coalition Against Forced Evictions are calling on the Zimbabwean government to take action to protect hundreds of thousands of people left to survive in substandard settlements five years after a program of forced mass evictions.

The government must provide adequate alternative accommodation or compensation to those left homeless and jobless, the two groups said.

"It is a scandal that five years on, victims are left to survive in plastic shacks without basic essential services. The needs of these victims are at risk of being forgotten because their voices are consistently ignored," said Amnesty International Zimbabwe's director, Cousin Zilala.

On May 18, 2005, the government of Zimbabwe began demolishing informal settlements across the country in an operation known as Murambatsvina. It affected more than 700,000 people, leaving them without a home or livelihood or both.

Most were driven deeper into poverty by the forced evictions, a situation that has been further compounded by Zimbabwe's economic crisis.

Following widespread local and international condemnation of Operation Murambatsvina, the government embarked on a re-housing program later in 2005. However, according to a press statement by Amnesty International, it was a dismal failure and now appears to have been abandoned.

Those affected by Operation Murambatsvina rapidly became invisible; forced to relocate to rural areas, absorbed into existing overcrowded urban housing or pushed into government-designated settlements.

Since its creation in February 2009, the unity government has done nothing to improve the plight of survivors of the forced evictions, Amnesty said.

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