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### Introduction

'Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order' was launched by the Government on Friday, 20 May 2005 after extensive consultations among stakeholders. The Operation has largely involved the Ministries of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, Home Affairs, and Small and Medium Enterprises Development. The primary objective has been to rid the urban environments of illegal structures and unlicensed trading premises. The aim of the national clean-up exercise is meant to decongest the cities and towns and establish an environment conducive to investment. A clean Zimbabwe provides a credible vehicle for investment, and a clean Zimbabwe provides and opportunity for tourism to flourish.

In his speech during the opening of the first session of the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Zimbabwe on 9 June 2005, His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Cde R.G. Mugabe said, "*The current chaotic state of affairs where SMEs operated outside the regulatory framework and in undesignated and crime ridden areas could not be countenanced for much longer.*"

Despite the noble objective of the operation, the Government of Zimbabwe has been condemned by some western countries for carrying out 'Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order.' The European Union Presidency has issued a declaration

citing 'brutal actions' in the operation; the British Government summoned Zimbabwe's Charge d'Affaires to express its anger regarding the whole operation and called on the Government of Zimbabwe to desist from carrying out the operation; the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs summoned Ambassador Machinga to protest prior to issuing a damning statement on June 8 2005; the Australian Foreign Minister released a press statement alleging violation of basic human rights and the rule of law, and the US Embassy's Public Affairs issued a news release deploring the displacement of people.

The United Nations Executive Director of the Nairobi-based Habitat wrote, in disapproval, to Ambassador Muzonzini offering policy advice and technical assistance to the Government of Zimbabwe. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, through its Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, has said that the operation is contrary to Zimbabwe's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Government's obligation to provide adequate housing for its population.

The clean-up exercise has been blown out of proportion and out of context by the western media. It is ironic that this is the same media that accused the Government of Zimbabwe of flouting the rule of law by letting people settle wherever they wished, and now that the Government is removing the people in order to regularize the settlements, the same media sees cause for criticism again.

**The western media blitz is not only ignoring clean-up exercises in their own backyards, but those in Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia as well.**

Thus the clean-up operation undertaken by the Government of Zimbabwe is not the first of its kind in the world, or indeed in Africa. Latest British media reports indicate that the Labour Government led by John Prescott, the Deputy Premier, is demolishing 400 000 homes in the Midlands and the North because these homes have now become slums. The British local authorities feel that the houses are too old and it would be cheaper to knock them down rather than try to restore them. About 20 000 homes were also demolished in Meyerside, Liverpool, in an operation that was defended by Yvette

Cooper, the British Housing Minister, who insisted that the demolition was the only realistic option. Basildon Council has announced plans to evict hundreds of residents at the controversial 600-strong Cray's Hill encampment near Wickford in Essex, because the settlers have no planning permission to stay there.

Zambia began a clean-up operation called "Clean-up Lusaka" in 1999, and is currently engaged in an exercise to rid all Zambian towns of illegal structures and settlements. Botswana has embarked on a campaign called "Clean Up and Make Botswana Beautiful", which was kick-started by the Botswana First Lady, Mrs. Barbra Mogae. This operation is meant to compliment Botswana's traditional no-nonsense approach to illegal structures that are razed down at short notice. South Africa is also carrying out a clean-up operation with the help of a private company called Wozani Security, which is popularly known as the 'Red Ants' because of the red overalls worn by the demolition teams. Since June this year, these teams have destroyed 6 000 shacks housing 18-20 000 people in Boksburg, an informal settlement in Lilianton. Another 300 people were evicted after the demolition of another illegal settlement in Germiston in Wadeville.

The current condemnation of Zimbabwe by the west cannot be divorced from the onslaught that the country has suffered as a result of its policies on political governance, on land reform and on the economic turnaround programme. Having been silenced by the successful conduct of Zimbabwe's sixth Parliamentary elections, the enemies of Zimbabwe's sovereignty have seized this clean-up exercise to once again turn the spotlight on the country. But contrary to the perception by the critics that the operation is politically motivated, the exercise has netted ZANU PF supporters, war veterans, civil servants and the generality of the populace including opposition party supporters.