

Press release

In wake of Zimbabwe demolitions, UNICEF calls for global support to alleviate crisis facing children

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 26 JULY 2005 – In the wake of a report by the United Nations Special Envoy regarding home demolitions and evictions in Zimbabwe, UNICEF today repeated calls for an immediate end to the operation and for full humanitarian access to more than 585,000 people who have been made homeless.

UNICEF said it was horrified at reports of children dying of easily treatable respiratory infections and of women being forced to give birth in the open.

Two months ago the Zimbabwe Government embarked on a nationwide “clean up” of its cities. The result has been the mass destruction of tens of thousands of homes, loss of livelihoods, and a particularly devastating impact on children.

“There is understandable outrage about what is happening to children in Zimbabwe,” said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. “More than 220,000 children are homeless, without access to food, water or health care. Tens of thousands of children are no longer in schools.”

The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, who spent two weeks assessing the situation in Zimbabwe, released a report Friday that said Zimbabweans “are today deeper in poverty, deprivation and destitution,” adding that many sick women and children, and hundreds of people living with HIV, no longer have access to health care services.

What UNICEF is doing in response to the emergency:

- UNICEF is distributing 90,000 litres of water each day
- Sanitation facilities set up in camps across the country
- Tens of thousands of blankets have been handed out
- More than 15kilometres of plastic sheeting has been distributed
- Giving support to mobile health clinics
- Play equipment – balls, crayons, paper – have been distributed to under 5s
- Temporary outposts have been established with key staff in other urban areas to begin interventions in government ‘transit camps’
- Offering psychosocial support to affected children, and reunification services to displaced children

UNICEF expressed concern that it remains virtually impossible to reach all those affected, noting that large numbers of children are now missing an education.

The agency said the crisis deepens a humanitarian nightmare that includes the world’s fourth-highest rate of HIV infection, fuel shortages, a growing food emergency, declining economic performance, and the sharpest rises in child mortality in the world.

UNICEF’s emergency operations in Zimbabwe continue to be expanded, and the organization is helping organize additional mobile medical clinics and planning the further distribution of blankets and shelter materials for children and their families.

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