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UN Representative Calls Zimbabwe Crisis Massive Internal Displacement

The Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) issued the following statement today:

The Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Professor Walter Kälin, today called for recognition of the evictions in Zimbabwe as a situation of massive internal displacement.

"What has been suspected has now become clear following the report of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Anna Tibajuka last Friday: in Zimbabwe we are facing a situation of massive internal displacement", Mr. Kälin said.

The Envoy's report, issued last Friday, cited 92,460 homes destroyed, within a matter of weeks, affecting an estimated 569,685 people. "Destruction of homes and forced movement of people on such a scale comes squarely within the definition of internal displacement, which covers people forced to leave their homes to avoid human rights violations and other disasters, whether human-made or natural". "What underscores the tragedy", the Representative added, "is that this crisis has been, from the start, entirely avoidable".

"The Zimbabwean Government's action is incompatible with international law in many respects", the Representative said. The [UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) set forth the rights of internally displaced persons under international law and the obligations of States. "These Principles", the Representative stated, "are based upon and reflect human rights obligations also accepted by Zimbabwe". They protect against arbitrary displacement in the first place and require due process, adequate notice, appropriate relocation and minimisation of adverse effects. They also require appropriate provision of the necessities of life to displaced persons, protection of their property, as well as offer voluntary choices to displaced persons as to where they will return. "On each and every of these points, the Government of Zimbabwe has fallen far short of its obligations".

The Representative called on the Government of Zimbabwe and the United Nations presence in Zimbabwe to respond urgently to the needs of the internally displaced. "What has already happened cannot be undone. What is now critical is that swift action be taken to protect the rights of the displaced - they are entitled to proper shelter, food, water and health care, and equal access to education for their children. They also have the right under international law to compensation for the loss of lawful possessions, and to freely choose their future place of residence". The Representative was confident that with rapid action on the part of the United Nations in conjunction with the Government of Zimbabwe, "ongoing violations of human rights on the massive scale we have witnessed can be quickly brought to an end, and the task of putting people's lives back together again can begin. The half-million displaced deserve, and are under law entitled to, no less than that".