

Mugabe's regime waging a campaign of genocide, activist warns

Cape Times (SA)

Date posted: Mon 4-Jul-2005

Date published: Fri 1-Jul-2005

If, in bitter winter, you deprive people and their children of shelter and thus also their food and clothing and warmth - if you deprive them of their tools of trade and their means of survival, you do this for one reason only: you intend them to die

By Melanie Gosling

Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina was a well-planned campaign designed by President Robert Mugabe's "genocidal regime" to kill the last of his opponents. Human rights activist and author Judith Todd, who was exiled by Ian Smith's Rhodesian government and returned to Zimbabwe after independence, said at the Cape Town Press Club yesterday that no one should be deluded about what was happening. "I do not use the word 'genocidal' lightly. Just as Gukuruhundi (the rape, killing, torture and beating of thousands of opposition Zapu supporters in Matabeleland in 1982 and 1983) was designed to kill, so is Operation Murambatsvina. If, in bitter winter, you deprive people and their children of shelter and thus also their food and clothing and warmth - if you deprive them of their tools of trade and their means of survival, you do this for one reason only: you intend them to die. The number of deaths was outstripping the number of births by 4 000 a week. Operation Murambatsvina's goal was "to get rid of the last vestiges of perceived opponents now described by the head of police, Augustine Chihuri, as a 'crawling mass of maggots' ". Even before the unleashing of Operation Murambatsvina, it was estimated that four million Zimbabweans were in grave danger of starvation. If the population was 10 million, the deaths of four million people would reduce the number to six million, which Didymus Mutasa, a minister of state in the office of the president, had said publicly was desirable. Todd, quoting a statement made by Mutasa in 2002, said: "We would be better off with only six million people, with our own people who support the liberation struggle. We don't want all these extra people."

Mugabe and Zanu-PF had been planning Operation Murambatsvina a long time. "As Mugabe was reported this morning on South African radio (as saying), it has been ... planned well in advance and ... 'a long-cherished desire'." Todd called on the international community to act. There should be no more solidarity with Zanu PF and no more political cover. The meetings of the G8, AU and UN in the next weeks should be used to launch "very serious action ... against the genocidal regime", including collecting evidence of crimes against humanity since 1980. Total sanctions should be imposed. "Stop all arms sales, all sales of spare parts, all bank loans - everything that can extend the life of the regime. (They) will not stop until they are stopped." The longer the regime survived, the greater the number of people who would die. Zimbabweans needed support because, with the destruction of the press, of the rule of law and of the economy, they could no longer drive change. Todd said Zanu PF prolonged the "fiction" of having been allies of the ANC since Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. But the ties had been forged between the ANC and Zapu under Joshua Nkomo. Zanu, under Mugabe, had stood with the PAC, "lonely, rejected, on the outskirts of the OAU".