

Australia, New Zealand pressure UN on Zimbabwe

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Australia and New Zealand plan to urge the UN Security Council to refer the actions of President Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe to the International Criminal Court.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Zimbabwe have been made homeless and at least five have been killed as a result of the government's township demolition campaign that began in May, according to humanitarian workers.

In a joint statement issued Saturday, foreign ministers Alexander Downer and Phil Goff said their countries will push a range of measures to increase pressure on Mugabe to stop the demolitions.

They said his regime should be made to cease the "abhorrent and egregious destruction of people's homes, livelihoods and basic human rights."

Downer, Australia's foreign minister, told the Sunday Age newspaper that international efforts to stop abuses in Zimbabwe have been too weak.

Australia and New Zealand had "decided to take a lead," he said.

He said Mugabe claims he is cleaning up slums and squatter settlements, "but he is clearing away the homes of many supporters of the main opposition party, the MDC [Movement for Democratic Change]."

Australia and New Zealand will also seek a sporting ban on all Zimbabwean representative teams as a way of exerting pressure over that country's human rights abuses.

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