

To: eP HARARE
From: eGram Gateway
Subject: Zimbabwe: Crackdown in Urban Areas:Id=0564055
Sent: 26 May 2005 14:10:18 GMT

Detail

3. Under the title "Operation Restore Order" over the last ten days the police have conducted a major crackdown in Harare including:

- arresting large numbers of street people and (licensed and unlicensed) traders in the city centre
- moving pick-up and drop off points for the (privately owned) public transport mini buses out of the city centre: and mounting road blocks checking such vehicles in particular
- visiting supermarkets and petrol stations and arresting those alleged to be "hoarding" supplies and/or holding forex "illegally"
- demolishing improvised market stalls etc. in low income areas, and threatening also to demolish more permanent structures - including building extensions where not approved by planning authorities.

4. According to government figures, some ten thousand people have been arrested overall, large numbers of vehicles impounded (as allegedly unroadworthy), structures destroyed, and goods either seized or (in the case of vegetables etc.) destroyed. Public justifications for these actions started with a claimed need to restore public safety in central Harare, but have progressed to claims of a conspiracy to undermine the economy, and thus the need to tackle saboteurs etc. The real motivation appears to be:

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- tightening of security in central Harare to prevent any possibility of mass demonstrations etc.
- an attempt to control the increasingly flourishing black market in virtually all goods, caused by spiralling inflation and shortages.

5. Although slow to build, initial public apathy and despair seems to be transforming into increasing anger, especially as the focus moved to high density residential areas. The (state controlled) Herald today carries stories of retaliation by youths against police action. There are also reports of state owned buses being burned in such areas. Initial police threats in some areas to demolish immediately illegal structures seem to have been changed into a requirement for their owners to dismantle them within three months.

6. Similar police action appears to be beginning in Bulawayo and other urban centres, but has not yet reached anything like the scale and pitch in Harare.

Comment

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