

## PRESS RELEASE

### - Zimbabwe -

### Political causes at the root of the current food crisis

**Paris, Harare, 17<sup>th</sup> december 2002** – The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) organised, together with its affiliate ZimRights - a Zimbabwean national human rights organisation – a seminar in Zimbabwe from 9 to 12 December 2002, with the participation of Solagral – a leading French NGO on food security issues.

During the discussions, the right to food emerged as a crucial issue, given the severe food shortage that the country is currently experiencing. For the crop season 2001/2002, cereal production is estimated at 670,000 tonnes, whereas needs are of 2,500,000 tonnes. The production of maize has fallen by a dramatic 67% compared to last year. Approximately 6 million people (out of a total population of 11.9 million) are estimated to have insufficient production, income and entitlement to be able to meet their minimum food requirements.

Though it is true that a drought has in recent months affected all of Southern Africa, thus limiting the food availability, it is far from enough to explain the amplitude and the severity of the food shortage. The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral hold the view that political factors, among which the lack of democratic control and an extreme politicisation of the issue of land rights, are the main causes behind the current crisis.

There is little doubt that a fairer and more transparent process of land redistribution, implemented following the rights to equal protection of the law, non-discrimination and due process, would have been instrumental in preventing such a significant decrease of food production.

It is evident that a redistribution of the land in Zimbabwe is required in order to achieve social justice. The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral nevertheless hold the view that the manner in which the "fast track" land redistribution programme has been enforced serves only narrow political interests, and has *de facto* harmed the very population it was supposed to benefit, i.e. the poor black rural population. Far from achieving more equality within Zimbabwean society (one of the most unequal in the world), it appears merely to have served the interests of the ruling elite and its political allies. It is a tragic irony that a fight fought in the name of human rights should reverse itself to cause added human rights violations to the population in question.

The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral note that the misconceived application of the right to land under the "fast track" programme has a direct bearing on the violation of the right to food. Indeed, the fall of production is due to farmers forced off the land at a time where they were expected to prepare for the cropping season, and to resettled farmers without capital and skills to maintain production levels. This fall of production has led to loss of their job for 150 000 black farm workers and their families.

Furthermore, the implementation of the "fast track" process has also had a very negative impact on civil and political rights in Zimbabwe ; indeed, the level of violence, arbitrary detentions, extra judicial executions, has dramatically increased; human rights defenders have been increasingly under attack since then.

The responses given by the government of Zimbabwe to the food shortage are also inadequate , and in many respects contrary to fundamental human right principles.

In particular, the FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral wish to denounce the politicisation of the distribution of food aid since the beginning of the food crisis. Indeed, there is now ample evidence that food distribution is subject to a discrimination based strictly on political affiliation. National and international NGOs as well as media organisations have for instance gathered numerous testimonies of people having to show their Zanu-PF (the ruling party) card in order to get access to food distribution sites and get food aid. The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral strongly condemn such politicisation of food aid, which is not only contrary to the principle of non-discrimination, but is also in direct violation of the right to food, enshrined in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Furthermore, the FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral wish to underline the perverse effects of the way the government manages the Grain Marketing Board in the grain imports. The aim of such monopoly is to maintain grain prices below their import parity levels, thus benefiting poor consumers. Unfortunately, the way the Board is being managed by the government has effectively discouraged private importers from intervening and has crowded out private sector participation and initiatives aimed at solving the crisis. The refusal of the government to allow other players to import both wheat and maize – thereby preventing any market based contribution to the crisis' resolution – has strongly aggravated the unavailability of food.

The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral condemn the violations by the government of Zimbabwe of its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Zimbabwe in 1991, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the [Declaration and Treaty of SADC](#) (Southern African Development Community) of 1992 and other international and regional instruments to which it is party. In particular the FIDH and Solagral note that the authorities have violated the fundamental principle of non-regression with respect to economic and social rights.

The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral remind that the right to food is a fundamental human right, and that it is both a prerequisite to the enjoyment of other rights (such as the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health etc.) and is dependent on the realisation of other rights, such as access to land, water, seeds, credit, etc...

The FIDH, Zimrights and Solagral urge the government of Zimbabwe

*As regards the current food crisis :*

1. To ensure a fair and impartial distribution of food not based on political affiliation;
2. To allow humanitarian and development agencies (*international, national, non-governmental and inter-governmental*) unrestricted access to all affected areas;
3. To make civil society a genuine and effective partner for the resolution of the current crisis

And,

*As regards the long-term realisation of the right to food :*

1. To entrench the right to food in the Constitution and to enact national legislation for its realisation;
2. To define and implement an effective poverty reduction strategy with a strong agricultural component;
3. To immediately enforce the right to land in a fair, equitable, secure and transparent manner following the principle of due process

The FIDH and Solagral urge the international community as a whole, member states of SADC, donor countries and international agencies intervening in Zimbabwe in particular :

1. To enforce a constructive dialogue with the government of Zimbabwe based on the respect Zimbabwe's commitments to international conventions, the International Covenant on Economic Social & Cultural Rights in particular;
2. To strengthen the partnership with civil society actors within Zimbabwe to ensure adequate food distribution.