

**UN INTER-AGENCY MISSION STRESSES NEED TO STRENGTHEN  
HUMANITARIAN WORK IN ZIMBABWE**

**(Johannesburg/New York, 26 February 2009):** A United Nations inter-agency humanitarian mission to Zimbabwe said on Thursday that the country's humanitarian crisis remained grave and called on both the government and the international community to support efforts by the humanitarian community to strengthen its work there.

Some of the most acute manifestations of Zimbabwe's complex humanitarian crisis include one of the world's worst outbreaks of cholera and up to seven million people in need of food aid.

"Despite tremendous efforts by both the government and the humanitarian community in Zimbabwe to contain the cholera epidemic, major challenges remain," said Catherine Bragg, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, who led the mission's 21-25 February visit to Zimbabwe.

She spoke of the need for continued food assistance and resources to help Zimbabweans improve food security.

"We have to ensure farmers have all the agriculture inputs they need for the next planting season, which begins in September. If we do not act now, we could end up next year with a situation similar to what we have today," Ms. Bragg said.

Members of the mission noted the international community's continued generosity to the people of Zimbabwe, saying additional resources will be required in the coming months to respond to the evolving situation in Zimbabwe.

They stressed the need to start planning for early recovery, noting that rehabilitation of the basic infrastructure is required. To effectively contain cholera, water and sewage systems need to be urgently repaired coupled with a public health outreach campaign that goes down to the district and ward level.

The mission met with President Robert Mugabe, who expressed his appreciation for the support Zimbabwe has been receiving from the humanitarian community.

Their discussions with Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and a number of cabinet ministers were also positive. The mission was given assurances of full cooperation with the United Nations and its partners.

The mission stressed that the welfare of the people was largely the responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe. "We trust that the all-inclusive government will quickly take the necessary steps to address the fundamentals of governance that would allow stability and economic recovery," the mission added.

Other members of the mission were Daniel Lopez Acuna, the World Health Organization's Director of Recovery and Transition Programmes, Robin Nandy, Senior Health Advisor at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Andrew Colin Parker, Senior Water and Sanitation Advisor, UNICEF, and Timo Pakkala, the World Food Programme's Deputy Regional Representative.

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