



## **WSSD offers little hope for the crisis-hit peoples of Southern Africa, says Oxfam**

An Oxfam International panel discussion in Johannesburg on Sunday morning – including representatives of Zambian NGOs, and Oxfam humanitarian and policy specialists – concluded that as the text of the World Summit on Sustainable Development’s implementation plan reaches its final stages, there is little currently to address the problems facing the 13 million people facing famine in Southern Africa over the long-term – or to prevent similar crises from occurring in the future.

‘Frankly, now our only hope is that the heads of state – including Tony Blair – who arrive on Monday will pull something out of the bag. In terms of producing any real plan to tackle poverty in the long term, for instance by addressing agricultural subsidies, the Summit has proved a sad disappointment so far,’ said Barbara Stocking, Executive Director of Oxfam Great Britain.

‘The current Southern African food crisis has many causes – including drought, bad governance, and the awful toll of HIV/Aids – but key among them are economic policies – forced on these countries by the rich world – that exacerbate their vulnerability to natural disasters like drought.’

In video testimony [**tapes available**] taken in Zambia just three days ago, farmers tell how they can no longer obtain seed or fertiliser, now that government supply systems have been privatised or abolished under World Bank directions. They have been reduced to cutting down trees and making charcoal to earn a living. ‘Zambia is becoming a desert, now,’ says one farmer.

Zambian Agriculture and Co-operatives Minister, Mundia Sikatana, says: ‘We have learnt bitter lessons. When you look at Europe and America, they are subsidising agriculture, but they tell us, “Don’t subsidise agriculture!” You ask them – why should there be this difference?... I am not saying that it is all bad with the World Bank and IMF – but those issues that matter most, they are totally failing.’

‘The IMF and World Bank can squeeze us, but they must look into the human faces of their policies. Two million people are facing famine in Zambia now,’ said Eularia Syamujaye, of the Zambian Institute of Cultural Affairs.

Available for interview in Johannesburg today, or by telephone: Barbara Stocking (Oxfam GB, Executive Director), Eularia Syamujaye (Institute of Cultural Affairs, Zambia), Sidi Mohamed Diawara (Oxfam GB, Regional Policy Adviser), Paulo Cuinca (Oxfam Mozambique), Jane Cocking (Oxfam GB Regional Programme Officer)

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