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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2417/02 by Margrietus van den Berg (PSE) to the Commission. Blocking by President Robert Mugabe of international food aid to some sections of the population in Zimbabwe.

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by Margrietus van den Berg (PSE) to the Commission

(14 August 2002)

Subject: Blocking by President Robert Mugabe of international food aid to some sections of the population in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe at present millions of people are in danger of starving to death. The expropriation of land owned by white farmers, combined with a drought and a retail price freeze, have given rise to serious food shortages. According to reports by the BBC and various aid organisations, President Robert Mugabe is denying people in some regions of the country access to international food aid on the grounds that they do not belong to his own political party.

Can the Commission confirm these reports?

If the reports are indeed accurate, what steps is the Commission taking, or what steps does it plan to take, to bring an end to this blocking of international food aid?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(24 September 2002)

The Commission is aware of the danger of partisan food distribution on the part of the Government of Zimbabwe.

There are credible reports of extensive politicisation of the sale and distribution of the Government of Zimbabwe's own food supplies.

As to international food aid, the World Food Programme (WFP), through which the bulk of Community food aid is delivered, reports that there is extensive community involvement in drawing up lists of vulnerable groups and in distribution, so this is not a monopoly of the local authorities and chiefs. Complaints investigated by WFP have revealed problems to be due more to a lack of information and understanding of selection criteria than to politicisation. There have, however, been cases of non-governmental organisation (NGO) distributions being subject to intimidation by war veterans.

The Commission has always maintained that food aid should under no circumstances be used as a political tool and that it should be provided on the basis of humanitarian need alone, without conditionality. To this end, the Commission is insisting that food aid operations in Zimbabwe be guided by transparent targeting and monitoring criteria. The Commission is consulting other partners in order to reinforce monitoring capacity in this field.