



Press Release

OCHA calls for respect of humanitarian principles

Kinshasa, 6 June 2007 – “I reiterate the invitation -- to those of you who are playing a central role in your communities, who have direct and privileged links with all their members, and who have their confidence -- to uphold your engagements to respect humanitarian space and to strengthen your participation in those mechanisms designed to improve the living conditions of all Congolese,” said Andrew Wyllie, acting Head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on Tuesday 5 March 2007, at the Conference of Church Leaders, Religious Denominations and Organizations for Peace, Security and Development in the Countries of the Great Lakes Region.

The Conference, held from 4 to 6 June in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, was organized as a forum to discuss the repatriation of armed groups and refugees, as well as sexual violence and other atrocities inflicted upon the civilian population of the Great Lakes Region.

Regarding the evolution of the humanitarian and security situation in the two Kivu provinces, the OCHA representative underscored the importance of humanitarian principles and stressed that humanitarian assistance must comply with the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, impartiality and, above all, must only be provided in consideration of need. He also insisted on the responsibility of all actors to protect civilian populations caught in the conflict. In this context, he recalled the importance of dialogue between humanitarian actors, provincial and local authorities and the various parties.

The OCHA representative also condemned the lack of respect for humanitarian space that had been seen. Access to vulnerable populations, particularly the internally displaced, he stressed, had been impeded in recent months by the growing insecurity due to the presence of various armed groups and ongoing military operations.

Mr. Wyllie applauded the efforts of churches to provide assistance to vulnerable populations and expressed his desire to see them play an even larger role in the humanitarian agencies' efforts to advocate with the parties to the conflict.

The Bukavu Conference brought together representatives of churches and church associations from Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ross Mountain, and the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eusèbe Hounsokou.