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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF MEETS PRESIDENT KABILA IN THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

(Kinshasa/New York, 5 September, 2007): In the Kinshasa today, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. John Holmes, met with President Joseph Kabila. In the meeting, the ERC and the President discussed their extreme concern about the humanitarian situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which the President characterised as “catastrophic.” However, the President also observed that the situation in North Kivu is not necessarily representative of the situation in the country as a whole, where a level of stability has been attained. They also discussed the need for increased protection of civilians and for more effective action to combat sexual and gender based violence.

At a press conference in Kinshasa, Mr. Holmes deplored the resumption of combat in Masisi District in North Kivu, where fighting has displaced more than 10,000 civilians since 27 August 2007. “The United Nations calls upon all parties to the conflict in North Kivu to respect fundamental humanitarian principles. All armed groups should allow humanitarian workers, who are bringing aid to vulnerable populations in need, unconditional and free access. Moreover, all armed groups should refrain from targeting civilians,” Mr. Holmes said. “The government of the DRC must honour its commitment to protect the entire civilian population on its territory,” he added.

After meeting the President, the ERC flew to Bukavu in South Kivu, where he is meeting with representatives of UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations. Tomorrow in South Kivu, Mr. Holmes will meet internally displaced persons and non-governmental organisations assisting them, and he will also visit Panzi Hospital and a centre for child soldiers before meeting with provincial authorities.

Since December 2006 the eastern North Kivu province in the DRC has been ravaged by violent clashes leading to the displacement of more than 224,000 people. Some find refuge with host families while others stay in camps where living conditions are extremely difficult. “The current complex and insecure environment makes access to displaced populations particularly difficult,” Mr. Holmes said. “In addition, the poor state of roads in the DRC significantly slows humanitarian assistance,” he noted.

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