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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN TEAM: EMERGENCY OPERATIONS NOT REQUIRED IN INDONESIA

(New York, 13 September 2007): A series of earthquakes struck Indonesia today, following an initial 8.4 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Sumatra the previous evening. The United Nations (UN) responded by sending a nine-person assessment team from Aceh to Bengkulu province, which arrived in the area at noon. Both Wednesday's and Thursday's earthquakes generated aftershocks and tsunami alerts that were subsequently called off, although a wave of up to nine feet was reported to have struck Padang, the capital of West Sumatra province, about 20 minutes after the initial quake.

In Bengkulu, the UN assessment team met the Vice-Governor and several Government officials, and also conducted assessments at a local hospital, before relaying their findings to the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Country Team, based in Jakarta. After reviewing those findings, the UN Country Team concluded that a major international relief operation was not required at this time.

"The response measures taken by Indonesia were quite effective, and demonstrate how preparedness can go a long way towards meeting needs in the aftermath of a disaster," said John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Also today, Vice President Kalla of Indonesia thanked the Secretary-General for the offer of assistance made by the UN yesterday, but said that the national response would suffice. The Indonesian Department of Social Affairs had prepared tents and meals for the displaced, while the Department of Health had prepared one ton of medicine, three tons of supplementary food for children under five, and one ton of food for distribution. The Crisis Management Centre of Ministry of Health has deployed 20 medical personnel to Bengkulu from its Palembang office. The military has prepared several planes to transport people, and helicopters from nearby airports are ready for use.

In Bengkulu province, Government assessments revealed that more than one hundred houses had collapsed, and thousands more had been damaged. Those displaced had gathered around two "concentration points" in Bengkulu city, the provincial capital. Around 10 deaths and 25 injuries have been reported. Some damage to public buildings and homes was also reported in Padang, the capital of West Sumatra province. Patients at all hospitals were evacuated; two out of five hospitals in Padang city were considered unsafe for operation. There were three deaths and nine injuries in West Sumatra.

In-country UN agencies will support Government efforts, if needed. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has one hundred tons of emergency supplies on stand-by in Medan, North Sumatra, while the World Food Programme (WFP) has food stocks available in Jakarta and Banda Aceh. The World Health Organization (WHO) is also prepared to work closely with Department of Health to assess needs.

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