

88,000 NEWLY DISPLACED BY INSECURITY IN MOGADISHU

(New York, 31 October 2007): Agencies monitoring the situation in and around Mogadishu have found that, from 27 to 29 of October, up to a further 88,000 Somalis have fled, of whom some 17,000 have been displaced within the city itself. Given the gradual outflow from the city of 25,000 people per month since June, the latest report indicates that more people have left the city in three days than in the last four months combined.

Increased fighting and a general decline in the security situation in the city are prompting this increased exodus. Entire districts have been virtually emptied of inhabitants, and statements by various authorities apparently ordering residents to leave certain districts have created panic. Force is being used indiscriminately by all parties, and house-to-house searches and large-scale detentions have created a climate of fear amongst the population not witnessed before. Insurgents in Mogadishu continued to target Ethiopian and Government forces. The attacks in Mogadishu are now more out in the open, better organised and occurring on a near daily basis. Attacks include the use of improvised explosive devices, assassinations, and roadside and suicide bombs.

More than 400,000 civilians left the volatile capital after fighting earlier in the year. Including the latest waves of displacement, and the around 350,000 long-term displaced, the total number of IDPs in Somalia is now more than 800,000. Overall, 1.5 million people in Somalia are in need of assistance and protection, a 50% increase since the beginning of the year. This drastic increase is due to conflict, displacement, food insecurity, malnutrition, and potential outbreaks of diseases such as cholera.

Conflict and insecurity are also impeding access by humanitarian agencies at this critical time, when protection, water and food are the most immediate concerns. "Respect for international humanitarian law in some parts of Somalia is negligible," said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. "I am very concerned that national and international NGOs are now saying that they cannot respond effectively to the crisis because access and security are deteriorating dramatically even as needs are increasing. It is the responsibility of the Transitional Federal Authority, including all officials at all levels, to do all they can to facilitate the major humanitarian endeavour required to save lives and ease the suffering of Somalia's people," Mr. Holmes stressed.