

SOMALI DISPLACEMENT REACHES NEW HIGH, MANY KILLED

(New York, 12 November 2007): In the last week, another 24,000 people have fled Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, following bloody clashes between insurgents and government troops. Last Thursday and Friday, at least 51 civilians were killed and another 30 wounded. As many as 114,000 residents have now fled the city since the last weekend of October, bringing the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country to an estimated 850,000. These include some 450,000 people displaced in 2007 because of conflict in Mogadishu, in addition to the estimated 400,000 IDPs displaced before 2007 by Somalia's long-standing conflict.

With the country now facing one of its worst humanitarian crises in years, the prevailing insecurity in Mogadishu has also seriously curtailed the movement of humanitarian workers, just at the moment when those remaining in the capital are in particularly dire need. As for those who have fled, a rapid assessment of displaced persons along a 15-kilometre stretch of the road from Mogadishu to Afgooye confirmed that 15 more makeshift settlements have recently been established, bringing the total to 70. At least 150,000 of the 180,000 residents of Mogadishu who moved to the Lower Shabelle region are seeking safety in these rudimentary roadside settlements, including about 60,000 people who arrived in the past ten days and who are living in extremely harsh conditions. This is taxing the resources of neighbouring villages, which are also experiencing difficulties similar to those of the IDPs.

As the UN agencies and other international organisations are reinforcing their emergency response in the Afgooye corridor, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Eric La Roche, led a delegation of international community representatives to Baidoa to discuss the crisis with Parliament members on November 8. The delegation warned the Parliamentarians that 10,000 severely malnourished children in Lower Shabelle are at risk of death if they do not receive help.

Meanwhile, in the northern region of Sool, where recent fighting between Somaliland and Puntland has resulted in large-scale displacement, the latest preliminary assessments indicate that there are about 30,000 displaced people who need humanitarian assistance. In Laas Caanood, at least 60% of the population, mainly women and children, have left. While basic needs for health care are being met, needs for water, sanitation and food are being assessed.

“Civilians are more than ever bearing the brunt of the fighting in Mogadishu,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. “I appeal to all those with guns, whether Government, insurgent, or Ethiopian troops, to refrain from indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks affecting civilians,” he added.