

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**UN DEPLOYS STAFF TO CYCLONE-HIT BANGLADESH**

(New York, 16 November 2007): The United Nations is deploying staff to and within Bangladesh after Super Cyclone Sidr swept through the country on the night of November 15. The World Food Programme (WFP) has deployed response teams to the southwest while the World Health Organisation (WHO) surge team is also on its way, with more staff due to join the team over the weekend. A task force has been already established within the OCHA Regional Office for Asia and Pacific and two Rapid Disaster Response Advisors are being deployed to the country to assist the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) on the ground. In addition, the United Nations Disaster Assistance and Coordination (UNDAC) system has a team on standby ready for deployment within hours, if requested.

Sidr, a Category 4 storm with a 500-kilometre radius and a 74-kilometer-wide eye, made landfall in Bangladesh in the late evening of November 15. Originating in the Bay of Bengal, the cyclone hit the entire south and southwest coast of the country from Cox's Bazaar to Satkhira district. With wind speeds up to 220-240 kilometres per hour and torrential rains, Sidr has brought significant damage to the country. With 153 million people confined to a surface of 144,000 square kilometres, the number of affected people is likely to be high. The local Red Crescent estimates the death toll at 550, but cautions that this number is likely to increase, especially among the fishing community as 1,000 people have been reported missing in Cox's Bazaar alone. Food and emergency health assistance are expected to be the initial priority needs.

As many as 3.2 million persons from 15 out of the country's 64 districts have been evacuated in preparation for the storm, which has contributed to a significant reduction in the loss of. About 620,000 of the evacuated were taken to more than 2,000 cyclone shelters opened by the government, while the remaining 2.6 million were moved to the highlands or sheltered in other buildings. At the same time, relief and rescue items have been stockpiled ahead of the disaster, including dry foods, medicines, tents, and lighting materials.

A total of 116 medical teams and tens of thousands of Red Crescent volunteers are working in response to the situation. International NGOs, including Save the Children, CARE, Oxfam and InterAction, have also stepped up their activities within the country. The response is being coordinated by the Disaster Emergency Response Group. In collaboration with the United Nations, the Government of Bangladesh has launched a joint assessment.

The Government of Bangladesh has already held initial discussions with local donors and urged all local actors to provide possible support. At the same time, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, announced today that emergency funds will be made available to the country immediately through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The CERF has granted US\$ 350 million this year alone in support of assistance projects to populations affected by humanitarian crises, including natural disasters.