

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF VISITS ETHIOPIA'S OGA DEN REGION

(New York, 27 November 2007): John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, travelled earlier today to Jijiga and Kebridehar located in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.

Currently, over 640,000 people in Ogaden require urgent humanitarian assistance, with food, medical supplies and water being the main priorities. Following an inter-agency assessment undertaken in late August 2007, the UN dispatched more than 7,300 metric tonnes of food to the five military zones in the region. In addition, preparations are being finalized to deploy 15 mobile health teams including 10 in the area of conflict. At the same time, the Government accredited more NGOs to work in the affected zones, although the modalities of their work remain to be worked out.

While in Jijiga, the regional capital, the Emergency Relief Coordinator met with regional government officials to discuss main humanitarian needs and challenges and ways in which the United Nations and its partners on the ground could support the local authorities in addressing these needs. Later, Mr. Holmes held consultations with representatives of the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), during which he discussed current humanitarian issues, concerns and possible solutions to improve the humanitarian situation in Ogaden.

From Jijiga, Mr. Holmes travelled to Kabridehar, where the United Nations recently established a field presence. Upon arrival, he met government officials to discuss the main needs in the area and how the government is addressing them. He also met with the United Nations staff and personnel of NGOs operating in the region to review the recent changes in the humanitarian situation and the main challenges that affect their operations.

“This was a valuable opportunity to get an impression for myself of the situation on the ground, and to see the work the UN team has already done to confront the serious humanitarian challenges in the region,” said Holmes. “Access and freedom of commercial activity are clearly key issues which I look forward to pursuing in my talks with the Government.”

He ended his visit to the Ogaden region with a visit to affected areas and points of ongoing relief distribution. While there, he stopped at a local market to meet people directly affected by the conflict in the area.

Mr. Holmes later returned to country's capital, Addis Ababa, where, on 28 November, he is scheduled to hold talks with senior national government officials, including the Prime Minister, the chief of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and heads of United Nations agencies.