

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**MORE INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED FOR REFUGEES IN
CAMEROON**

(New York, 28 November): Cameroon may not be able to provide adequate humanitarian assistance for Central African refugees who keep arriving in the east of the country and for the local populations that host them. In recent months, the United Nations system in Cameroon supported the country's government in developing an assistance plan and providing significant humanitarian assistance for the displaced. However, unless more international assistance is forthcoming, local and national authorities soon may not be able to respond, especially as the needs and numbers of refugees increase.

To date, more than 45,000 persons have come to Cameroon, fleeing violence and insecurity in the north-western provinces of the Central African Republic. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Cameroon reports that it has registered as many as 23,000 CAR refugees between May and October 2007 alone and estimates that another 7,000-10,000 of the nomadic Mbororos are likely to seek refuge in the country in the near future. These new arrivals would seriously tax the host country's ability to provide humanitarian assistance and would also increase the risk of tension, because natural resources in the area, especially water, are running low and will soon be insufficient to sustain both the host populations and the displaced.

While the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north-east of the Central African Republic are decreasing, violent conflict between the national army and rebel groups, crime and insecurity continue to drive people away from their homes in the north-west. On 26 November, media reported that rebels had killed one Government soldier and injured four others during an attack near the border with Cameroon. Across the north of the country, more than 300,000 persons, or over 7% of the country's population, remain internally displaced or have fled to neighbouring countries. In fact, in the seven northern-most prefectures out of the country's 16, IDPs account for almost 14% of the total population. And where people return to their home villages, they are sometimes put under pressure to do so.

Proliferation of local and foreign armed criminal gangs, kidnappings, and the violent conflict between rebel groups and the Government continue to spread mayhem among the local populations. Fear is so wide-spread that nomadic cattle farmers avoid their usual transit trails and opt out for safer routes, usually those near cities and towns. This overall insecurity poses a serious threat to the process of return and reconstruction and may result in an increase of Central Africans seeking refuge in Cameroon or other neighbouring countries.