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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF CALLS FOR IMPROVED COOPERATION
TO EXPEDITE ASSISTANCE TO DARFUR**

(New York/Khartoum, 2 December 2007): John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, concluded a four-day visit to Sudan on Sunday, stressing the importance of maintaining a positive and constructive dialogue with the government on the humanitarian imperative.

During his visit, Mr. Holmes met with the Government, UN agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations, donors and people affected by the conflict. He visited both northern and southern Darfur, where he met with local government officials. He acknowledged that the Joint Communiqué, signed after his last visit in March, has proved a good mechanism to address concerns of the humanitarian community operating in Darfur, particularly bureaucratic issues, while making clear that there are still concerns in some areas.

“The purpose of my mission was to discuss these issues with the government and to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground. It is important to strengthen trust and confidence, which requires a personal and continuous commitment from me and from many others. While the signing of the Joint Communiqué has moved us a long way, some important challenges remain in making sure humanitarian principles are fully respected and reaching all those who need help”, he said.

“I am concerned that displacement is still continuing, even while some people have been able to return. We also need to keep working at increasing the ability of humanitarian agencies and workers to operate in an efficient and timely manner, despite problems such as car-jackings,” Mr. Holmes added.

Mr. Holmes was given assurances by the government that there would be no problem with the extension of the “Moratorium on restrictions” enabling international NGOs to continue to operate as smoothly as possible in Darfur. He expressed the strong hope that it would be formally extended soon. “This is vital considering that on December 11, the Sudan Workplan 2008 requesting \$2.2 billion to address humanitarian, early recovery and recovery and development needs will be launched, including \$825 million for Darfur. NGOs are the main implementing partners on the ground,” said Mr. Holmes.

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Mr. Holmes also said that the UN stood ready to help with extra food needs, for the population of Darfur as a whole, if early indications of a potentially poor food harvest in Darfur were confirmed.

On the issue of returns, Mr. Holmes made clear that it was the aim of all concerned to ensure that the displaced could return to their normal lives as soon as possible. At the same time, the conditions for this had to be right. He listened to the concerns of internally displaced people in a camp near Ed Daein in southern Darfur. They expressed their strong desire to return but also told him that they would only do so once it was safe. They hoped basic services would be in place too.

“It is clear that the return of IDPs must always be voluntary and participative and that they return to suitable and safe areas accessible by humanitarian service providers”, Mr. Holmes said.

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