

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**USG VISITS NEWLY DISPLACED SOMALIS FROM MOGADISHU ON
MISSION TO AFGOOYE**

(New York/Nairobi, 3 December 2007): John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, returned from a one-day trip to Somalia today, on the final leg of his four-country regional mission to Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya and Somalia. Mr. Holmes flew into the “K50” airstrip, 50 kilometres outside of Mogadishu, and then travelled through Afgooye where he visited a few of the 70 settlements of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to gain first hand information on the situation of IDPs and their challenges. There are currently about 230,000 IDPs dispersed along a 15-kilometre stretch of the road between the capital Mogadishu and the town of Afgooye, more than half of whom have fled the ongoing and worsening violence in the capital in the past four weeks.

Mr. Holmes and his team visited the Hawa Abdi clinic and therapeutic feeding centre for malnourished child IDPs. He also met with groups of newly displaced IDPs, who told him their personal stories.

“This was my second trip to Somalia in six months, and it was striking to see the changes the country has gone through. Everyone I spoke to had fled the terrifying environment that has engulfed Mogadishu,” said Mr. Holmes. “Clearly it’s the civilians who are getting caught in the crossfire of this ongoing conflict. Violence, pressure and intimidation of all kinds are clearly getting worse.” On a positive note, the ongoing humanitarian response in the areas visited was clearly visible. The team witnessed an array of ongoing activities for the vulnerable including water trucking, distributions of plastic sheeting for shelter, and vaccination campaigns, as well as therapeutic feeding for the malnourished. However, there is concern about the potential seriousness of the situation of the people in other inaccessible areas, and in Mogadishu itself. Difficulties of access, such as road blocks and ad hoc taxation, remain a major problem.

From Afgooye, Mr. Holmes travelled to Baidoa, the interim seat of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), to meet the newly appointed Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein. With the Prime Minister, the USG discussed the concerns of the international community about the humanitarian situation in Somalia, and also the priority to be given to the protection of civilians, particularly in Mogadishu.

“The humanitarian response is high on the agenda of the Prime Minister, along with security and reconciliation,” said Mr. Holmes. “There is a recognition on his part that we all have to work together to overcome the massive humanitarian challenges that confront Somalia today. But we need to see that translated into action.”

The Somalia mission concludes the Emergency Relief Coordinator’s trip to the region and he returns to New York tonight. On Thursday, 6 December, he will brief the UN Security Council on the findings of his mission.

For further information, please call: Dawn Elizabeth Blalock, OCHA Somalia, +254-734-210-102; Jens Laerke, OCHA Regional Office-Nairobi, +254-722-513-503; Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.