

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

INSECURITY THREATENS HUMANITARIAN AID IN CHAD

(New York, 5 December 2007): The humanitarian community in Chad is deeply concerned about the impact of the ongoing fighting in the east of the country on their ability to provide aid to over 230,000 Sudanese refugees and 180,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as to communities that host them. At present, armed conflict is limiting humanitarian space and curtailing the ability of aid workers to move freely and safely in most parts of eastern Chad, cutting off vulnerable groups from vital humanitarian assistance. The United Nations and their non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners are also deeply concerned about the safety of both civilians and aid workers in areas close to the fighting.

The humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the country has continued to deteriorate in the course of 2007. The arrival of new refugees and IDPs in the course of the year has significantly increased pressure on natural resources and stressed host communities. In addition, the increased demands of this larger population have also led to a deterioration in water and sanitation conditions in and around IDP sites and refugee camps, which has triggered an increase in water-borne diseases.

The recent fighting is preventing staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) from reaching refugees and Chadian IDPs. Similarly, due to restrictions on movement, the World Food Programme (WFP) is confronting difficulties in distributing the December food aid rations, which benefit 230,000 Sudanese refugees, 180,000 IDPs and about 150,000 members of the host communities. This lack of aid may even contribute to security problems in and around the camps as resources become scarce. More importantly, it poses a significant threat to the survival of the vulnerable. Assistance in areas such as primary health care, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, as well as protection, is also inevitably affected. As humanitarian workers are not able to move as they would like, information gathering on the precise situation of the vulnerable is difficult, and the scope of the impact of the fighting is not yet fully known.

"I appeal to the Government of Chad to take all necessary measures to preserve humanitarian space in the east of the country and to increase its commitment to protect civilians in combat zones. I also appeal to rebel movements operating in the area to act in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law," said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. "Unless immediate action is taken to ensure unrestricted and safe access to the vulnerable populations, the humanitarian situation will rapidly deteriorate and could lead to a significant loss of lives," he added.