

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**CONCERNS OVER SECURITY OF HUMANITARIAN STAFF INCREASE IN
RUTSHURU, NORTH KIVU**

(New York, 19 December 2007): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs expressed today on behalf of the humanitarian community serious concerns regarding the security conditions of aid staff working in the area of Rutshuru, in particular the locale of Bwisha.

In fact, in the course of 2007, more than ten security incidents involving vehicles and humanitarian staff have been reported in the Goma-Rutshuru, Rutshuru-Nyamilima and Rutshuru-Bunagana corridors. Most of these incidents were perpetrated by armed groups and resulted in material losses. Just last Sunday, a vehicle of an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) was attacked in Nyongera in the middle of the day while the population watched helplessly.

Despite these systematic violations of humanitarian principles, humanitarian organisations have maintained their field operations for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of vulnerable and displaced persons. For the last two weeks, these organisations are responding in partnership with local health authorities to an outbreak of cholera in the city of Rutshuru.

We are requesting the Government and all armed groups present in this zone to take all necessary measures urgently to improve security and facilitate access for humanitarian organisations on the ground.

To date, three international organisations have announced that they would be suspending their operations on the ground for the next 48 hours, from Thursday (20 December) through Friday (21 December). This temporary cessation of activities will help them to reevaluate the security situation and to make the parties to the conflict realise the risks related to a withdrawal of humanitarian presence in the event of a more serious incident.