

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF CALLS FOR RESTRAINT, PROTECTION OF  
CIVILIANS IN DARFUR, SUDAN**

(New York, 18 February 2008): Today, as Government of Sudan aircraft resumed aerial bombardments near Abu Sarraw in West Darfur, United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes called for all parties to the conflict in western Darfur to refrain from further attacks and exercise maximum restraint.

“I am very concerned for the civilian population caught in the middle of this violence. Should further attacks occur, the consequences for 20,000 civilians in this area could be disastrous,” said Mr. Holmes.

Following the lifting of a nearly two-month Government blockade of the northern corridor of West Darfur, humanitarian agencies, with support from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), have been working to assess and deliver assistance to the beleaguered civilian population. However, as the Government has reportedly now banned all flights to areas north of El Geneina for the next three days, further efforts to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground are limited. Reports from Darfur, including reports of Sudanese Air Force and affiliated militia massing in the area and renewed aerial bombardment on the villages at the base of Jebel Moun today, indicate another wave of violence is imminent.

This latest round of violence in West Darfur follows fighting that took place earlier this year and the end of 2007. In December and early January, the Khalil Ibrahim faction of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacked Government positions north of the West Darfur capital of El Geneina, taking control of several key towns. This attack directly threatened the lives of civilians, as did the joint operation involving Sudanese Armed Forces and militia forces.

Rapid assessments have revealed severe consequences from the violence for some 160,000 civilians in the northern corridor connecting El Geneina and Kulbus, including the 20,000 currently at risk in Jebel Moun. The civilian population has experienced widespread displacement, property damage, and significant trauma and loss of life. Approximately 57,000 civilians were displaced due to the offensive. Along with countless homes, many compounds of non-governmental organizations have been looted or destroyed. Thousands of civilians have arrived in already overstretched IDP camps near El Geneina or across the border into neighbouring Chad.

“All parties have to act now to stop these attacks and help bring those responsible for attacks against civilians to account under international law,” Mr. Holmes emphasized.

More than 300,000 civilians fled violence in 2007, pushing the total number of internally displaced people to 2.4 million. Malnutrition indicators in some areas exceed emergency thresholds, and reports of failed crops mean that emergency aid in rural communities will have to be increased. There are some 13,000 relief workers in Darfur trying to reach more than 4.2 million people with life-saving assistance.

“What we need most is an effective ceasefire. The rebel groups and the government must choose now to stop the violence,” said Mr. Holmes.