

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN Humanitarian Chief and UAE Leaders
Share Concern Over Rising Food Prices

(Abu Dhabi, Dubai, New York, Geneva, 7 April 2008) — John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, was today in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, as part of his six-day mission to the Gulf region. He met with the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Anwar Korkash as well as officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the UAE Red Crescent Society.

Mr. Holmes, accompanied by Mr. Abdul Aziz Arrukban, the United Nations Special Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General based in the Gulf region, discussed collective humanitarian challenges, focusing particularly on the adverse effects of increasing food prices, which have affected even prosperous countries in the Gulf, but which are especially hitting the poorest and most vulnerable throughout the world. The parties also agreed to improve their partnership through concrete steps to strengthen coordination mechanisms between UAE's humanitarian aid and the UN humanitarian system, and to jointly seek innovative ways to encourage further investment in worldwide relief efforts at this time of increased need.

“I have found a shared concern around the region about the potential effects of the current structural shift upwards in basic food prices across the world,” said Mr. Holmes. “Tackling this global issue is a long term challenge to the wider international system, but meanwhile we need to be aware of the short-term humanitarian effects in terms of increased hunger and greater strain on our resources in trying to combat this. This is a huge common problem we have to address together,” he said adding that The World Food Programme has recently appealed for an extra \$500 million to maintain their existing programmes this year because of rising food and fuel prices.

UN Special Humanitarian Envoy, Abdul Aziz Arrukban, praised the commitment from the UAE for closer collaboration and coordination of UAE's international aid programme at the regional and global level. He encouraged the UAE Government and civil society interlocutors to engage further in the multilateral relief efforts, and particularly encouraged a more prominent role for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in collectively tackling future humanitarian challenges.

Tomorrow, Tuesday 8 April, Mr. Holmes will deliver the keynote speech at the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development (DIHAD) conference before moving on to Kuwait and Qatar as part of his mission to four countries in the Gulf region to strengthen collaboration and partnerships on humanitarian issues between the Gulf States and the United Nations. Mr. Holmes and Mr. Arrukban will be meeting with government officials as well as senior representatives of the GCC and national Red Crescent Societies to encourage closer mutual collaboration and their active support of multilateral humanitarian activities.