

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**FIGHTING HAMPERS RELIEF AID IN NORTH KIVU, DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

(New York, 23 September 2008): As a result of continuing fighting and generalised insecurity in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, delivery of relief assistance to vulnerable populations has been seriously impeded. In particular, a string of attacks on vehicles belonging to humanitarian organizations and looting of humanitarian aid have forced humanitarian aid workers to reduce movements of personnel and goods drastically.

“I am deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo at a time when tens of thousands of civilians have again been displaced,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Since 28 August, renewed fighting between the Congolese armed forces and rebels from the National Congress for People’s Defense (CNDP) has led to the displacement of civilians in the province of North Kivu. Most of those forced to flee had already been displaced in the past year in previous waves of fighting. This means that they are particularly vulnerable, with their survival mechanisms already stretched. Many of these displaced persons are hiding in densely forested areas and very hard to access.

Meanwhile, all parties to the fighting appear to be engaging in widespread looting of civilian infrastructure, including health centres and houses, in conflict-affected areas. These crimes are further hampering the ability of humanitarians to assist hundreds of thousands of civilians in need of assistance in these areas.

“Poor families in eastern Congo are not only being deprived of life-saving humanitarian assistance due to simple insecurity but are also being subjected to looting and common banditry,” Mr. Holmes said. “All parties to the conflict should recall their obligations to guarantee unconditional and safe access to humanitarian organizations. Despite the conflict, they are also responsible for respecting civilian infrastructure and private property. Humanitarian aid is independent, impartial and neutral, and its disruption or manipulation by any of the parties to the conflict is quite simply contrary to international humanitarian law, for which those concerned should and can be held accountable,” Mr. Holmes added.