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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF APPEALS FOR CALM AFTER HAITI SCHOOL COLLAPSE

(New York, 10 November 2008): UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes expressed his heartfelt condolences to the relatives and friends of the children and teachers affected by the collapse of the La Promesse school in Nerette, Petion ville commune, Port-au-Prince.

“This terrible catastrophe means more suffering and tragedy for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, already struggling to recover from years of war, poverty and successive natural disasters,” Mr. Holmes said.

Search and rescue operations conducted by Haitian, French and American rescue teams have been on-going since the collapse happened last Friday. The rescuers are working in shifts to sift through the debris. Operations are expected to continue until Tuesday. Mr. Holmes appealed for calm in Port-Au-Prince to allow emergency rescue workers and medical organizations to do their expert work.

“Emergency rescue teams attempting to reach trapped people have been seriously impeded by crowds who are sometimes blocking the movement of heavy lifting equipment and medical supplies and preventing the evacuation of wounded people. I entirely understand people’s grief and desperation. But this only slows down rescue operations,” Mr. Holmes said.

It is still unknown how many children were in the school when it collapsed, but the government has estimated 250-260. Latest official information provided by the Haitian Civil Protection Unit shows that 89 victims are reported dead; 150 wounded persons have been transferred to hospitals.

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