

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES SUPPORT FOR PROGRAMS PROTECTING
CIVILIANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

(New York/Khartoum, 26 November 2008): John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, visiting Darfur for a second day, stressed the importance of protection of civilians and the need to continue programs in this area.

In a visit to Hamadiya camp near Zalingei in West Darfur, where around 40,000 displaced persons live, one of the leaders of the internally displaced there underlined that the fundamental problem after five years remains “security, security, security.”

“To ensure the protection of civilians, programs such as those related to gender based violence, mental health and the rule of law, which are as much a part of modern humanitarianism as food and medical care, must be supported,” stated the ERC.

Visiting Zalingei for the first time, Mr. Holmes also met Government and civic leaders and discussed the devastating effect the conflict is having on the environment, particularly forest cover and water resources. “We need to do something now. We cannot simply wait until after a political settlement is reached as it will be too late,” said Mr. Holmes.

Part of the United Nations and Partners Workplan 2009 for Sudan, launched on 20 November calling for \$2.2 billion overall, includes proposals such as systematic environmental assessments, promotion of alternative energy and construction technologies, and improving resilience in the face of drought, in order to mitigate damage to the environment for future generations.

“More sustainable use of natural resources would not only help deal with poverty, but would also reduce the chances of further conflict in regions like Darfur,” said Mr. Holmes.

Mr. Holmes met local government officials in both Zalingei and El Geneina to discuss these issues, including how to improve mutual cooperation. While in Zalingei, he also visited Taiba, the IDP camp in Darfur for internally displaced members of local Arab semi-nomadic communities. Families he met explained the continuing challenges they faced in adapting to their sedentary existence in the camp, and in key areas like food and education for their children.

On Thursday the Emergency Relief Coordinator will depart Darfur for a two-day visit to Agok, Abyei and Juba, before moving onto Khartoum at the weekend.