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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ATTACKS ON DRC AID WORKERS TOP 100 IN 2008

(New York, 22 December 2008): Five incidents of harassment, confiscation of materials and vehicles, pillaging of relief supplies, and a deadly attack on an aid convoy in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) last week took the total number of attacks on aid workers in that country to more than 100 in 2008.

OCHA has repeatedly warned that the lack of humanitarian access in the region is cutting off large numbers of displaced people and other needy Congolese from life-saving assistance, and gravely endangering the lives of humanitarians. Several key routes are no longer accessible due to permanent insecurity linked to the presence of armed groups in Rutshuru territory. Soldiers from the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and the rebel National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) and other unidentified armed men have all been implicated in the attacks.

“As we pass this awful threshold of 100 reported attacks on aid workers in the DRC this year, I insist in the strongest terms that all the armed groups operating in that country, including the national army, ensure the safety of these essential staff, not least for the sake of the people they are desperately trying to help,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Despite the severe risks, sufficient food for 297,000 beneficiaries in North and South Kivu was distributed earlier this month, and efforts to relocate IDPs re-displaced by fighting earlier this year are continuing.

“Aid workers are impartial and independent and are protected by international law. Anyone who targets them is not only committing a serious crime, for which they are accountable, but also holding their own people hostage by making it even harder to get essential relief supplies through,” Holmes emphasized.

For further information, please call: Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679, bunker@un.org; Nicholas Reader +1 212 963 4961, mobile +1 646 752 3117, reader@un.org, John Nyaga, OCHA-NY, +1 917 367 9262, nyagaj@un.org; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570, byrs@un.org. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.