

**Office of the United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia**

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**Abducted UN staff in Somalia released safely**

**[16 March 2009, NAIROBI]** – The four UN staff members who were abducted early Monday morning were released unharmed late Monday night.

“I am very enormously relieved that our staff are free and safe. The United Nations is very grateful for the efforts and intervention of the local authorities who used their influence and reach to ensure our dedicated staff was cared for and ultimately released safely and quickly,” stated UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Mark Bowden. “This is an important affirmation that the UN presence and its activities in the surrounding areas is accepted and protected by the local communities and leaders.”

The staff who were abducted were in a UN convoy traveling between the UN Compound in Waajid, Somalia, and the local airfield were comprised of three international staff and one Somali national staff. The staff members were a nutrition expert for WFP and two UN volunteers working for the UN Development Programme in Puntland. All three were in transit from Puntland to Nairobi on an overnight stop in Waajid. The fourth abducted was a Somali national who was working for the UN Humanitarian Air Service based in Waajid.

The staff taken by a small, independently operating group, due to the prompt intervention by local authorities they were released with no one harmed. The incident was not directly targeted at the UN.

“The quick and positive resolution of this incident will ensure the aid operation can go on unhindered,” stated Mr. Bowden. “Waajid has been a longstanding and important aid hub serving relief activities in Somalia.”

Close to 50 percent of the Somali population, or some 3.2 million people, are reliant on humanitarian assistance. One in every seven children is malnourished. The vast majority of those in humanitarian emergency are in the South Central regions of Somalia.

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