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**UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator calls for respect of Somali Civilians caught in Mogadishu Conflict Crossfire**

[GENEVA, 15 May 2009] The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mr. Mark Bowden, spoke out today regarding the plight of Somali civilians in Mogadishu, hundreds and thousands of whom have been killed, wounded and displaced in the past week of fighting.

“I am deeply concerned about the civilians who are caught in the midst of a situation where they face the choice of displacement or death,” said Mr. Bowden, speaking from Geneva. “Many of them have only recently returned to Mogadishu from camps all over the country, which was a heartening expression of hope and faith in the peace process. Now, caught in the crossfire of the conflict, they are being victimized again.”

In the first three months of the year, some 70,000 Somali displaced people were estimated as having returned to Mogadishu. In the past week of fighting, about one-third of them, or 34,000, have been forced to flee areas of conflict in the capital city. Reports from hospitals confirm some 500 civilians wounded and as many as 180 civilians have been killed in the conflict. Civilian casualties outnumber military casualties.

“All parties must respect the international laws of conflict. The fact that civilians are suffering casualties indicates that the combatants are not discriminating between armed fighters and unarmed civilians,” stated Mr. Bowden “This is a gross violation of the laws of war. The killing and wounding of civilians is never justifiable for any military objective. I call on all parties involved to protect the unarmed citizens caught in the midst of this conflict.”

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