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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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**UNHCR-UNICEF Joint Media Release
Human Rights Violations Escalate in War-torn Mogadishu**

NAIROBI, 9 June 2009: UNICEF and UNHCR are gravely concerned over the extent to which civilians are being affected by the escalating violence in Mogadishu and the human rights violations being committed by the parties to the conflict. Many Somali civilians and media describe the recent violence which erupted in Mogadishu on May 7, generated by fighting between Government-allied forces and armed opposition groups, as the most devastating in the last few years. Reported bombing of civilian residences and public places has forced an estimated 117,000 people to flee their homes in Mogadishu during the past four weeks alone.

The majority of the displaced are women and children, many fleeing with very few belongings, and having to endure extremely difficult circumstances. Women are particularly vulnerable with reports of rape and sexual exploitation during their flight and in places of refuge – risks that are exacerbated by the limited humanitarian assistance available. More than 200 people were reportedly killed in the last month alone, the majority of whom civilians. Reports from hospitals indicate that some 700 people were wounded in the clashes. Reports received from NGO partners supporting a hospital in Dayniile indicate that of the 218 wounded people treated in that hospital, 81 of them were women and children under the age of 14, including a six-month old baby.

The manner in which civilians are being victimized by this conflict is unacceptable. War Crimes and crimes against humanity are committed with impunity on a daily basis by the parties to this protracted and violent conflict. Reports indicate that people desperate to flee are stuck in their residences for days, waiting for a lull in the fighting to be able to 'safely escape' from Mogadishu, with no access to food, water or any basic service. A hospital in Yaaqshiid district was unable to operate temporarily due to fears for the safety of its medical staff, limiting access to medical care for wounded civilians.

"Yet again, parties to the conflict in Mogadishu fight with no regard for the safety of civilians in clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights principles" stated Mr. Guillermo Bettocchi, the UNHCR Representative for Somalia, today in response to the fighting. "The international community must intervene to end this self-perpetuating culture of impunity, including by establishing a credible and independent process to investigate and eventually prosecute those responsible for the apparent war crimes and crimes against humanity that Somali civilians have and continue to be exposed to." added Mr. Bettocchi.

Countless families have allegedly been separated due to the conflict. There is no safe place for children in Mogadishu in the current situation. Children are being killed and maimed in their own homes, in schools, and on the residential streets of the city. The events of May have worsened a pattern of indiscriminate violence that has seen at least 34 schools temporarily occupied by armed groups since the beginning of the year, and at least six schools raided or shelled in the last twelve months.

Children are also threatened by the systematic and widespread recruitment into forces of all sides of the conflict currently taking place in Somalia. Adolescent boys are particularly targeted. Orphaned, separated, abandoned or destitute children are especially vulnerable.

"Parties to the conflict must realize that the main victims are their own children, who are being killed, maimed or displaced by the fighting, some even recruited to take part in the fighting," said Ms. Hannan Sulieman, Acting UNICEF Representative to Somalia. "Recruitment of children is in contravention of international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and use of children under 15 years old in combat is a war crime with legal consequences for the perpetrators".

UNHCR and UNICEF call on all those involved in the conflict in Somalia to put an end to the grave human rights violations being committed on a daily basis against civilians.

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For information please contact:

Roberta Russo, Ass. Public Information Officer, UNHCR Somalia, +254733121136, russo@unhcr.org
Iman Morooka, Communication Officer, UNICEF Somalia, +254714606733, imorooka@unicef.org