

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF VISITS DISPLACED FAMILIES IN PAKISTAN

(Islamabad/New York, 8 July 2009): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes today visited Peshawar, Mardan and Swabi, in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

In Peshawar, the ERC held meetings with the Governor of the NWFP, Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani, senior relief officials from NWFP and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and UN agencies. The ERC expressed his appreciation for the cooperation with the Government, while expressing concern about some groups still having difficulty with the registration process and about preparations for the monsoon. For their part, the Government representatives noted their concern about the difficult conditions faced by the displaced, and about the resumption of education when the school year begins on 1 September, given that the displaced are currently sheltering in over 3,700 schools in the Province. There was agreement on the desirability of early returns as long as they are voluntary and can be properly sustained.

The visits to Mardan and Swabi provided a glimpse of the complex mix of displacement in this crisis -- with around 90% of the 2 million displaced in spontaneous settlements, rented accommodation or with host families, and only some 280,000 in camps. Despite widely varying circumstances, all are suffering in the extreme heat. After meeting families and individuals in very different settings through the day, Mr Holmes commented on his impressions.

“A common thread running through my discussions with the displaced was that they all want to go home as soon as possible. Many told me they would leave this very afternoon -- if conditions were right. But they need to be sure that they will be safe when they go back, that basic services are there, and most importantly that they will not have to leave their homes again.”

In Mardan, he visited a spontaneous camp in Kas Korona school complex, which is currently home to some 3,000 displaced people. The complex of some six schools of various educational levels offers very basic, crowded shelter for the displaced. In Jamal Garhi, the ERC went to a village where a population of around 1500 people have taken in almost the same number of IDPs, either in their own houses and compounds or in spare land in the community. One family of seven had taken in 95 distant relatives from Swat. UN Habitat and other agencies are helping with tents and other supplies but there are obvious questions about the sustainability of such arrangements.

After visiting Sang-e-Marmar hub, where hundreds of displaced living in non-camp situations were receiving WFP rations and non-food items from UNHCR and UNICEF, the ERC ended the day with a visit to Yar Hussain camp in Swabi district. The camp is home to almost 30,000 displaced people hailing mainly from Buner district. In the well-organised camp, he visited a health centre, a nutrition centre, a school, and a recreation area for children. He also had a private meeting with women in the camp and families.

“We still need to do more to help people both now and in the coming months,” Mr. Holmes said. “In particular, we must do more to help the host families and communities, who have shown incredible generosity. Those who will remain displaced will need help for some time, and those who go back will need help for six months to make sure they can stand on their own feet again,” he said.

On Thursday 9 July, Mr. Holmes will travel to Buner District in the NWFP.

*For further information, please call: OCHA Pakistan: **Stephanie Bunker**, mobile +92 300 850 2397, bunker@un.org;
OCHA New York: **Nicholas Reader**, +1 212 963 4961, mobile +1 646 752 3117, reader@un.org
OCHA-Geneva: **Vanessa Huguenin**, +41 22 917 1891, huguenin@un.org
OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int
For more information about CERF, please see <http://cerf.un.org>*