

# United Nations Nations Unies

## Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

### **UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF: WE ARE AT A CRITICAL MOMENT**

(Islamabad/New York, 10 July 2009): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) John Holmes today briefed the press in Islamabad on the last day of his mission to Pakistan.

On his first visit to the country in his current capacity as Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Holmes expressed his appreciation for the cooperation of the Government of Pakistan in helping meet the needs of those displaced in recent months. “The Government of Pakistan and the humanitarian community have done a commendable job in the circumstances in tackling a massive and very rapid displacement crisis,” he said, pointing to the provision of food, water, sanitation and health care, among other necessities, to up to two million people. He stressed, however, that more is required to reach all those in need. While it is easier to reach those in camps, 90% of the displaced are elsewhere, in schools or other public buildings, and with host families.

Acknowledging the generosity and selflessness of host communities, he said that more had to be done in particular to help both the displaced and their hosts in these situations. This could be seen in his trip to the village of Jamal Garhi, in Mardan district, where there were as many displaced people as residents, and in one case, one family was hosting some 95 displaced people. The ERC lauded the fortitude of the displaced, saying that he was astonished at their “resilience and ability to cope under very difficult circumstances. I was struck,” he said, “by the many, many children I saw, who are living in abnormal and unfamiliar situations but who are trying to lead normal lives as children despite that. They and their families are in need of urgent help right now, and we will need to help them live even better lives later,” he concluded.

The ERC focused particularly on the timing and nature of the return of the displaced. In Buner district, officials had told him that already, more than half of the displaced had returned. Mr. Holmes said that, from his own observations during his trip to Buner, normal life did appear to be resuming to some extent. He said that the situation in other districts, where the UN has so far had no access due to security concerns, was harder to assess. The UN supported the desirability of returns as soon as possible, and people wanted to return as soon as they can. At the same time, Mr. Holmes underlined that returns must be genuinely voluntary, and that conditions on the ground must be right, including security and the restoration of basic services.

In the meantime, preparations continue for the monsoon season and for further displacement that may come as other military operations are undertaken. Mr. Holmes emphasized the need for respect for International Humanitarian Law in all cases, and stressed that the attention of the media and donors continues to be vital. “We are at a critical moment. The suffering we see here is every bit as real and as deserving of help as suffering we see elsewhere,” he said. “I therefore urge the donor community to respond generously.”

Mr. Holmes also met the President of Pakistan, Asif Zardari, civil society, non-government organisations and donors on 10 July. He leaves Pakistan on 11 July.

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