

**CLIMATE CHANGE WILL EXACERBATE NATURAL DISASTER-RELATED
DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA**

(Kampala [Uganda] and New York, 22 October 2009): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes today attended the African Union Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Opening today in Kampala, Uganda, the Special Summit provides a platform for the African Union members to discuss issues related to displacement. There will be a particular focus on finding durable solutions for those displaced, whether that means supporting them to return home, settle in another area or integrate locally in the place where they have found refuge. Moreover, the African Union was expected to take the ground-breaking measure of adopting a Convention on Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. The convention would be the first of its kind: a legally binding regional treaty that recognizes the multiple causes of internal displacement, recognizing natural disasters and development projects, as well as conflict, as drivers of this phenomenon.

During his intervention in the “Natural Disasters, Climate Change and Food Security” panel, Mr. Holmes stressed the importance of the convention’s recognition of natural disasters as causes of displacement, particularly against the backdrop of climate change. “Too often the humanitarian implications of climate change and the need for adaptation to the new, more dangerous reality of more frequent and intense natural disasters are forgotten as the world focuses on the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” he said.

“In reality, displacement prompted by natural disasters and climate change, and the resultant food and water shortages, promise to be one of the greatest – if not the greatest – challenge many countries will face in the years ahead,” stressed Mr. Holmes. “Many of you here today already know all too well from recent painful experiences how climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme natural-hazard events, particularly floods, storms and droughts,” he added.

In 2008, there were 104 internationally reported natural disasters, 99 percent of which were climate related. Moreover, the number of people in Africa affected by natural disasters has doubled over the last 20 years, from 9 million in 1989 to nearly 17 million in 2008.

Mr. Holmes noted that while everyone is affected by climate change, those most vulnerable are likely to be hit hardest by its impact. He emphasized that disaster risk reduction and mitigation efforts must be enhanced, for example intensive water-retention measures in drought-prone areas to feed irrigation schemes and reduce dependence on rain-fed agriculture. He also underlined the need to do everything possible to reduce displacement caused by natural disasters, to ensure that those displaced receive the relief help they need, and crucially to promote durable solutions for those who find themselves in protracted displacement.

Concluding his remarks, the Mr. Holmes said: “The true measure of the success of this summit and the convention will be when we start to see a reduction in the scale of displacement, and more effective solutions for those who have been displaced – and above all an end to the enormous suffering that this has brought to so many people on this continent.”