



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

SOMALIA: FIERCEST FIGHTING SINCE 1991 TAKES HUMANITARIAN TOLL

(New York, 12 April 2007): With the fiercest fighting since the outbreak of the war in 1991 and very poor access to those in need, the humanitarian situation in Somalia is the worst it has been for over a decade. The fragile ceasefire forged on 1 April 2007 broke down when fighting resumed yesterday in Mogadishu. Civilians fleeing the city have been subjected to harassment, threats, rape and robbery at checkpoints.

“I am deeply concerned about events in Mogadishu. Although it seemed that there was some hope, it took only days for the truce to be broken and the suffering of the population to be on the rise again,” said John Holmes, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

In March, hundreds of civilians were killed, and more than 1,000 wounded were registered in Mogadishu’s two main hospitals. Nearly 200,000 people have fled the capital since 1 February. In addition, the population of South/Central Somalia has experienced unprecedented drought, severe flooding as well as three waves of intense fighting, all within the last year. Somalia also faces an outbreak of acute water diarrhoea (AWD) as a direct consequence of the flooding in late 2006, with 400 casualties so far.

While the situation is dramatically deteriorating, the humanitarian community faces serious obstacles in assisting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups. Support is hampered by the on-going insecurity, harassment, intimidation and even detention of aid workers, and inaccessibility to prepositioned relief items in Mogadishu due to high military presence and activity in the vicinity. “These incidents compromise the independent and impartial nature of the humanitarian response. Indeed, they are paralyzing the response,” said Holmes.

Meanwhile, human trafficking from northern Somalia to Yemen continued in March, with tragic consequences. On 22 March, at least 29 people died and 71 went missing when smugglers forced 450 Somalis and Ethiopians into the Gulf of Aden. So far in 2007, more than 4,400 refugees have landed in Yemen, with at least 166 dead and 96 missing. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that in 2006 some 26,000 Ethiopians and Somalis have been smuggled to Yemen – with at least 3,300 dead and 300 missing.

For further information, please call: Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679; Kristen Knutson, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 9262; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.