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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PEACE PROCESS IMPROVES HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN NORTHERN UGANDA

(New York: 17 April 2007): “The humanitarian situation in northern Uganda and parts of Southern Sudan has improved significantly in the past year,” said Margareta Wahlström, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, today, adding, “People are returning to their homes and re-establishing their livelihoods.

“However, the conclusion of a final peace accord between the parties remains necessary to sustain and promote further progress on the humanitarian front,” stressed Ms. Wahlström. “Thus, the announcement of the extension of the Cessation of Hostilities and resumption of the peace talks has renewed our hope for an end to the humanitarian crisis that has gripped the region for more than twenty years,” she concluded.

A renewed commitment to the Cessation of Hostilities, as well as the resumption of peace talks -- scheduled for 26 April 2007 -- and the assembly of LRA forces at Ri-Kwangba in Southern Sudan were the announced outcomes of the 13 to 14 April meeting between the Government of Uganda and the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), chaired by United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Joaquim Chissano.

Sustained security improvements over the past year, attributable to the peace process, have given some 1.4 million displaced Ugandans -- many of whom have spent two decades in overcrowded camps -- renewed hope that peace will finally come to their conflict-stricken land and encouraged many to begin the process of returning to their homes.

In the past year, more than 300,000 of the displaced have left the camps to return to their areas of origin in northern Uganda. This movement, made possible by the population’s increasing sense of security, is largely attributable to the cessation of hostilities between the Government of Uganda and the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) resulting from the ongoing peace talks in Juba, Southern Sudan. Among other assurances that the situation is improving, there have been no civilian abductions since the start of the talks, while the phenomenon of “night commuters” -- children who daily travelled long distances to shelter overnight in urban centres -- has dramatically reduced.

Despite this progress, however, northern Uganda requires continued emergency relief and protection, as well as assistance in returns and early recovery. Some one million displaced remain in the camps. And while returning families benefit from greater access to cultivable land, the lack of schools and health facilities in areas of return have prompted some to leave their women and children behind in the camps. Meanwhile, in eastern Teso district, the 130,000 displaced Ugandans who remain in camps have little prospect for return due to continued instability resulting from insecurity in the neighbouring district of Karamoja.

Over the past two decades, the conflict between the Government and the LRA has resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and the displacement of two million people.

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