



UNITED NATIONS

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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

## **SOMALIS CONTINUE TO FLEE MOGADISHU AS UN WORKS TO INCREASE AID**

(New York: 27 April 2007): Some 365,000 Somalis -- more than one third of the city's population -- had fled the latest round of insecurity and violence in Mogadishu by Friday, as the capital's remaining residents reported that sections of the city have been completely deserted.

Civilians have continued to flow out of Mogadishu despite the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)'s claim to have taken control over much of the city. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 110,000 of the displaced have gone to Galgadud, while 84,000 have gone to Lower Shabelle, 63,000 to Middle Shabelle, and 40,000 to Mudug. The majority of the displaced are women, children, and the elderly.

On Thursday, the World Food Programme (WFP) and partners delivered some 320 metric tonnes of food to approximately 35,000 displaced Somalis at six sites along the road from Mogadishu to Afgoye, where more than 40,000 have fled from the capital, while the UNHCR distributed shelter and household supplies including plastic sheets, blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans to some 36,000 displaced persons in Afgoye over the past weekend. A second distribution, for 13,500 people, is planned for Saturday.

Additionally, humanitarian agencies have delivered non-food supplies to 23,000 displaced people sheltering in and around Merka, while the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partners have provided chlorine, cholera kits and medical supplies to health facilities and partners in various locations.

While aid organizations have been striving to bring urgently needed aid to the displaced, their efforts have been hampered by the general insecurity in and around Mogadishu, as well as restrictions on their work. "What we have been able to accomplish so far represents just a trickle of the aid needed for the torrent of displacement," said Stephanie Bunker, Spokesperson for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The city of Mogadishu has been a no-go zone since the beginning of the fighting, and movement in areas surrounding the capital also remains difficult. On 26 April, the SOS children's and maternity hospital in Mogadishu was struck by mortars, reportedly resulting in the death of several patients. The hospital was closed and all staff evacuated. Meanwhile, the road between Mogadishu and Baidoa remains insecure, while those between Mogadishu and Afgoye and Merka respectively have been sporadically closed by military activity. Agencies also continue to experience difficulty in accessing their warehouses in Mogadishu where supplies have been pre-positioned.

On Monday, United Nations officials met with TFG members in Baidoa, Somalia, regarding the restrictions that have been hampering aid deliveries. At the meeting, the TFG promised to facilitate humanitarian access, including by opening all civilian airports to aid agencies. An Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the Minister for Health has been designated as the focal point for the humanitarian response to the present crisis. While it remains too soon to judge whether this commitment is being honoured -- a judgement that must be based on aid agencies requesting and receiving access -- yesterday's successful WFP convoy is an encouraging sign.

Of added concern, there are signs that the insecurity in Mogadishu is having a destabilizing effect on other regions. Serious clan fighting erupted in the town of Kismayo in Lower Juba on Monday, killing 11 and leaving 40 wounded. Meanwhile, in Afgoye, with more than 40,000 of those displaced from Mogadishu, there has been a rise in robberies, including in broad daylight. The town's residents, most of who subsist on less than one dollar per day, are facing sharply rising prices for basic supplies such as food, water, housing and medicines due to increased demand. Some local shop and landowners are charging very high prices, while, along the road from Mogadishu to Afgoye, landowners are reported to be charging a fee for allowing the displaced to sit in the shade of their trees.

Compounding concerns, the number of cases of Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) reported in south/central Somalia is now over 17,000, with 600 related deaths. Some cases have been confirmed as cholera. The majority are concentrated in Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle. Given the continuing displacement and the onset of rains, the incidence of AWD/cholera may rise further.

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