



UNITED NATIONS

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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF: DISPLACED UGANDANS POISED BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR

(New York, 16 May 2007): The United Nations Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), John Holmes, today returned from Northern Uganda to Kampala, capital of Uganda, where he met with Uganda's Foreign Minister, donors, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Winding up his visit to Kitgum in Northern Uganda, Mr. Holmes today met staff from UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross movement. Although the humanitarian and security situation in Northern Uganda is better than it was three years ago, humanitarian problems continue and are a long way from being solved, the Under-Secretary-General said. He also noted that the international community now has many opportunities in Northern Uganda, including making a successful transition in the triple effort to provide aid for relief, recovery and development and increasing partnership with the Government of Uganda.

"We cannot afford to waste this opportunity," Mr. Holmes said. "We have no excuse not to get it right in Uganda, because we can see recovery on the horizon. But it will require collective engagement for several years to come," he cautioned.

In a frank exchange with donor representatives in Kampala, touching on both funding and the Juba talks, Mr. Holmes expressed his concern that the appeal for Uganda is still only half funded. He also noted that continued UN support for the Juba process is already paying off in a better humanitarian situation in both Northern Uganda and in South Sudan. For their part, donors expressed support for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and for the peace process.

Last night Mr. Holmes spent the night in Namokora camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and attended a traditional gathering in the camp with 500 people, holding discussions with elders, ex-combatants, formerly abducted women and children, and community leaders.

"People who are in camps or in new settlements are poised between the hope of returning home and the fear of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)," Mr. Holmes said. "Surprisingly, ex-combatants do not feel bitter and angry," Mr. Holmes added. "Impunity has been a curse in Uganda and in the region. The goal is to strike the right balance between peace and justice on the one hand and between forgiveness and impunity on the other," Mr. Holmes concluded.

Speaking at a press conference in Kampala today, Mr. Holmes offered his condolences to the families and friends of the Ugandan peacekeepers killed today in Somalia. He was especially saddened, he said, because highly professional Ugandan peacekeepers had personally protected him during his recent mission to Somalia.

The Under-Secretary-General will return to New York tomorrow (17 May 2007) and is scheduled to brief the United Nations Security Council on his mission to Somalia and Uganda next week.

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