

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF ALARMED BY FORCED RELOCATION IN DARFUR

(New York: 29 October 2007): "I am alarmed about the reports of forced relocation last night from Otash camp in Nyala, South Darfur, both about the manner in which the relocations were apparently carried out and the possibility that such action could contribute to more violence," said John Holmes, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Tensions remain high between various groups throughout camps in Nyala. Kalma camp, the largest camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur, was recently the scene of clashes that claimed the lives of three civilians. Those IDPs just relocated from Otash had sought security there approximately one week ago, after fleeing violence in Kalma. Otash camp is home to over 60,000 IDPs.

During the incident, the new Kalma IDPs were surrounded by the police. A joint United Nations/African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)/International Organisation for Migration (IOM) team was denied access to the camp by the representative of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). When they managed to enter the camp despite this prohibition, they observed 10 vehicles with heavy machine guns surrounding an IDP gathering while 8 large commercial trucks were loading the belongings of IDP women and children. The police informed the joint team that people were being moved to Amakassara.

"While the United Nations notes the Government's concern about the security situation in the camps, it is imperative that any relocation be wholly voluntary, in agreement with the internally displaced," Mr. Holmes said. "We have had many meetings with the Government of Sudan, stressing that that any relocation should be voluntary and should adhere to the guiding principles of internal displacement," Mr. Holmes added. "Given that security forces were threatening the displaced with sticks and rubber hoses at Otash camp, the involuntary nature of this relocation is clear, and is contrary to agreements with the Government," he emphasized.

All these concepts including relocation are guaranteed in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the United Nations, IOM and the Government of Sudan in August and September 2004. IOM has also expressed its concern over the conditions of the reports of the forced relocation of the IDPs from Otash IDP camp and, as charged by the August 2004 MoU, is preparing a formal statement about the conditions of the movement following an investigation. IOM has noted that it is particularly concerning that they, along with other members of the international community, were denied access to the IDPs during the relocation in order to determine fully the conditions of the move.