

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES CHANGE OF POLICIES IN THE OCCUPIED
PALESTINIAN TERRITORY**

Jerusalem/New York, 4 March 2010): On the fourth day of his mission in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes visited vulnerable Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank.

In Shu'fat refugee camp, in East Jerusalem, Mr. Holmes saw the negative impact of the construction of the Barrier on this Palestinian community, as on so many others. By cutting off the population from east Jerusalem - their traditional centre of life - the Barrier has constrained access to basic services, such as health and education. It has also limited livelihood opportunities, since most people worked in Jerusalem before. Mr. Holmes also witnessed the humanitarian impact of continued demolitions and forced evictions in Al Bustan and Sheikh Jarrah, two Arab neighbourhoods of east Jerusalem, where many families have been displaced during the past months and many more are at risk. He talked to a family of Palestinian refugees in Sheikh Jarrah, who are at risk of being evicted because of a court ruling and an evacuation order from the municipality.

Expressing serious concerns about the situation in east Jerusalem, Mr. Holmes noted that besides endangering peace efforts, the construction of the Barrier, settlement expansion, forced evictions and continued demolitions had a severe humanitarian impact on Palestinian communities.

“I was moved by what I saw and I heard today during the discussions I had with Palestinian families being forced out of their homes,” Mr. Holmes said. “The recent decision of the Jerusalem municipality to delay planned demolitions in Al Bustan is a positive step, but what is really needed is the cancellation of demolition orders and evictions in Palestinian areas,” he added.

Mr. Holmes also visited a school in the Al Jahalin Bedouin community in Area C of the West Bank. The community, which has been living in the area for generations, has come under increased pressure recently, due a nearby settlement and the restrictions on building permits and access to the area. The school, which was constructed with the assistance of UN agencies and NGOs, has been marked for demolition. Mr. Holmes stressed that there can be no justification for depriving children of an education. “The case of this school shows how difficult it has become for herding communities to continue living in Area C, and for humanitarian agencies to assist them. Demolition orders in Area C should be lifted and humanitarian agencies allowed to assist communities in need,” said Mr. Holmes.

Mr. Holmes shared his concerns about these issues and the continuing blockade of Gaza later in the day with the military authorities, including General Etan Dangoth, head of COGAT, which coordinates the Israeli government activities in the West Bank and Gaza. While acknowledging recent efforts by the Israeli authorities to bring more goods into Gaza and to improve movement in the West Bank, Mr. Holmes underlined that these measures still fall well short of what is needed for the Palestinian population living there.

“People need to be given the opportunity to live normal and dignified lives. For this to happen, marginal improvements here and there are not enough. More radical changes of policy are required. In Gaza, the crossings must be fully reopened; in the West Bank, illegal demolitions and evictions should stop and natural development should be allowed in Area C,” Mr. Holmes said.

In Ramallah, Mr. Holmes met Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. He expressed his support for the Palestinian Authority and reiterated the determination of the United Nations and the humanitarian community as a whole to continue bringing assistance to vulnerable communities in all occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza. Mr. Holmes is due to leave Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory on Friday.

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