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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF VISITS GAZA IN WAKE OF MILITARY OPERATION

(New York, 21 January 2009): United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes arrived in Jerusalem today for a five-day mission in the region to review humanitarian needs in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in the wake of the recent military operation in the Gaza Strip.

Civilians in Gaza bore the brunt of the conflict, with 412 children and 100 women killed and 5,450 people wounded. Ten of thousands of people were rendered homeless after their areas were damaged or destroyed during bombing raids. Mr. Holmes plans to stress the need to facilitate quick delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. He is scheduled to have meetings with both Israeli and Palestinian officials to exchange views on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Mr. Holmes will visit several sites in Gaza to examine the extent of damage to buildings and infrastructure, including United Nations properties. He will also visit facilities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), where tens of thousands of civilians sought shelter after fleeing their homes during the military operation in Gaza. He plans to tour Shifa Hospital, where many Palestinians wounded during the fighting have received care.

The Under-Secretary-General is also due to have meetings with United Nations staff in Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as representatives of other humanitarian agencies, civil society and donors.

Mr. Holmes is also due to make a one-day visit to Egypt for meetings with UN officials, the Red Cross Movement and representatives from other humanitarian agencies.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health estimates that 1,314 Palestinians were killed in the 23 days of the military operation in Gaza. The bombing and shelling caused extensive damage to civilian facilities throughout the Gaza Strip. Supplies of basic food and fuel, and the provision of electricity, water and sanitation services remain critical.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has warned that there will be long-term consequences of the latest conflict because livelihoods and assets of tens of thousands of Gaza civilians have been affected.