



UNITED NATIONS

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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR WELCOMES PROGRESS
TOWARDS PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

(Kampala and New York: 10 September 2006): “The ongoing peace process is the best and most serious opportunity we have had to end the conflict in northern Uganda,” said United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland today.

In northern Uganda on the second leg of his eight-day, three-nation mission to Africa, Mr. Egeland spent Saturday night in Opit IDP camp in eastern Gulu district, where he participated in a traditional gathering with approximately 70 members of the IDP community, sharing their meal and discussing issues of concern for the community, including the ongoing peace negotiations between the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the impact peace could have on the peoples’ lives. The gathering is an Acholi tradition, which has been eroded over the past twenty years because of the massive displacement of the civilian population due to the conflict between the Government and LRA.

Upon arriving in Gulu yesterday, Mr. Egeland walked to Opit IDP camp, accompanied by representatives of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Médecins sans Frontières-Spain and Caritas, who provided an overview of the primary challenges faced in providing assistance to the displaced. At the camp, he met with community elders, camp leaders and local elected officials, as well as with a group of former LRA combatants and a group of former LRA women abductees who provided firsthand accounts of the reintegration process.

Returning to Gulu today, the Emergency Relief Coordinator visited a new settlement site for returning IDPs currently under construction and met with a group of former women abductees who formed the local association, Empowering Hands, to assist other women going through the reintegration process, as well as with a group from the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) and elected and administrative leaders of the district.

Meeting with the United Nations agencies and NGOs active in Gulu, Mr. Egeland encouraged them to work to fill existing gaps in aid, stressing the importance of moving with the people as the returns process progressed. He also noted that his stay at Opit camp augured well for future humanitarian work, as it had only been possible due to improved security conditions in the area. The United Nations and NGOs, he said, should be able to increase their humanitarian footprint given greater access to the IDP camps.

The central concern voiced in all his encounters in Gulu was the population’s fear that the indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of the five most senior LRA leaders could jeopardize the peace process. In response, Mr. Egeland acknowledged the important role to be played by traditional Acholi justice mechanisms, but stressed that there could be no impunity for those allegedly responsible for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and even genocide. Bringing justice to northern Uganda should incorporate traditional justice mechanisms, he said, but must go beyond them as well.

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