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UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

UN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS URGE PARTIES TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST TO FULLY RESPECT AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

21 July 2006

The Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Walter Kälin; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Jean Ziegler; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Ambeyi Ligabo; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Paul Hunt, and the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Muñoz issued the following statement today:

"We, express our grave concern that the on-going armed conflict in Lebanon, Israel and Gaza poses serious human rights and humanitarian threats to the civilian population. We call on the parties to the conflict to fully respect the principle of proportionality in the conduct of hostilities and to refrain from indiscriminate attacks on civilians causing loss of life and mass displacement. We urge them to immediately agree on the cessation of hostilities in order to permit unrestricted and secure passage of all humanitarian assistance.

Eight days after the extension of the hostilities to Lebanon, large numbers of civilians continue to be killed and wounded. In Lebanon, civilian populations have been deprived of their housing and access to critical services. The massive destruction of public infrastructure obstructs delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need of urgent medical assistance, food, and safe water and sanitation. The lack of sanitation increases the risk of infectious diseases. According to UN estimates, about 500,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon, many of whom must seek refuge in schools, public buildings or are stranded in open spaces.

The reported destruction of schools will detrimentally affect enjoyment of the

right to education in the long term. The wounding of media professionals, destruction of media infrastructure, and restrictions on access to war zones pose a threat to the freedom of information and expression.

In Israel, large numbers have been forced into shelters, many are fleeing northern cities, and water supplies in the north have been affected.

We recall that the civilian population must be protected in all circumstances and parties to a conflict must comply with the international legal obligation to distinguish between civilian and military objectives. International human rights law and humanitarian law both recognize the need to ensure the rights of civilians to life, food, the highest attainable standard of health, housing and other fundamental human rights which remain applicable in times of armed conflict. Provisions of international law protecting persons against being displaced and during displacement, as restated in the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,* are of special relevance. Adequate measures should be taken as a matter of urgency to protect the civilian population and ensure non-discriminatory access to all necessary assistance and services, including proper accommodation for the displaced, in particular the most vulnerable.

The international community must not ignore that the current upsurge of violence in the region is triggering a serious humanitarian crisis. We join the call of the United Nations Secretary-General for an immediate cessation of hostilities and urge all parties to meet their obligations under international law."

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