

EMBARGO, 12 December 3p.m., Geneva time

**Fourth Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Human Rights Situation in Darfur, Geneva, 12 December 2006**

**Statement by Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator**

Mr. President,

Less than three weeks ago, upon completing my fourth and last visit to Darfur, I warned the Security Council that the “next weeks may be make or break for our lifeline to more than 3 million people. This period may well be the last opportunity for this Council, the Government of Sudan, the African Union, the rebels, and all of us to avert a humanitarian disaster of much larger proportions than even the one we so far have witnessed in Darfur.”

In the few weeks since that visit, events on the ground have deteriorated even further, but have also shown much worse it can still get:

- Last week, violence and direct attacks against relief workers in all three states of Darfur forced us to relocate by far the largest number of humanitarian workers since the start of the conflict. More than 220 of them had to be evacuated from six locations.
- This past weekend, heavily armed militia attacked a civilian convoy near Sirba in West Darfur, looted relief supplies, and massacred some 30 civilians traveling with the convoy.
- More villages have been attacked and destroyed, forcing a total of more than 50,000 people to flee their homes in the last six weeks alone.
- And while aid workers are increasingly being attacked physically, the Government has not even agreed to extend the moratorium on restrictions on our life saving work beyond the end of January 2007.

The trends we are seeing now are truly alarming, and they are spreading to Chad and the Central African Republic: more violence against civilians, more forced displacement, and dramatically less access to those most in need of relief. Without access for relief workers for extended periods, and without protection from militias intent on massacring civilians, several hundred thousand lives will be at risk within a matter of weeks, not months.

For more than two years, more than 13,000 relief workers have been risking their own lives to provide relief under ever more dangerous conditions. Their sole agenda is to relieve the suffering of the Sudanese civilians, but their daily work is increasingly turning into a nightmare. More of their colleagues have been killed in the last six months than in the previous two years combined. Rebel forces, militias and bandits are attacking them every day, stealing vital supplies, hijacking their vehicles, beating them and threatening their lives. And the Government is imposing more and more restrictions on them again, as well as contributing to a climate of fear and intimidation. It is intolerable that after

more than three years of conflict and violence, those committing the gravest crimes against civilians are enjoying more freedom than those trying to save the lives of millions. Not even in areas without rebels and with huge Government military and police forces is anything done to curb the violence of the militias.

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Delegates,

I know that some of you have been on your own trips to Darfur and may dispute my description here. Let me therefore state the following: In few if any areas of the world can the international community rely on so many highly reliable sources of what is happening on the ground, ranging from dozens of UN human rights officers and your own rapporteur to thousands of relief workers and African Union troops. The basic facts of what I have described here are thus beyond dispute.

What we need now is urgent action to ensure that we do not miss what may be our final opportunity to reverse the trends that are pushing Darfur and the region towards disaster. The Human Rights Council has a crucial role to play in maximizing the pressure on all sides, and should see this special session as an important early test of its credibility and effectiveness. I therefore appeal to you to set aside political divisions, and send the strongest possible and united signal that this Council will not tolerate one of the world's gravest human rights crises to continue, or get infinitely worse.

Thank you, Mr. President.