UN Deputy Humanitarian Chief, Catherine Bragg, warns of deepening humanitarian crisis after visit to Yemen

(Sana’a/ New York, 29 November 2011) After a four-day mission to Yemen, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Catherine Bragg, today warned that millions of Yemenis are facing a severe and worsening humanitarian crisis.

“I remain deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in Yemen,” said Ms Bragg. “We are seeing chronic deprivation made worse by continuing violence, with some of the world’s highest malnutrition rates, a breakdown of essential services and a looming health crisis.” In Yemen today, millions of vulnerable people are now in acute need, not only those who are directly affected by the conflict or displacement.

Ms. Bragg’s visit was intended to assess firsthand the intensifying humanitarian crisis in some parts of the country and discuss with partners ways of strengthening the response to the growing needs. While in Yemen, Ms. Bragg met with Government and humanitarian partners in Sana’a, and travelled to Aden in the south, and Harad’h in the north.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced by the fighting in Abyan Governorate and most have found refuge with host families or are living in school buildings in Aden and neighbouring governorates. “I impressed upon the local authorities the need to find durable solutions for IDPs living in schools and ensure humanitarian actors have access to all areas where civilians are being displaced,” underscored Ms. Bragg.

In northern Yemen, where some 300,000 people remain displaced by the conflict in Sa’ada, the ASG met families living in Al-Mazrak camp and visited a supplementary feeding centre. Many of these people are unable to return to their homes because of insecurity, fears of retaliation, and loss of livelihoods and assets. “Despite the best efforts of aid agencies, I noticed a deterioration of the situation compared to what I saw a year ago,” noted Ms. Bragg.

In 2012, humanitarian partners will expand their programmes to target 3.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, requesting total funding of US$452 million.

Ms. Bragg’s visit took place following important political developments in the country. However, despite the signing of the transition agreement, humanitarian needs in Yemen are projected to deteriorate over the next year. “I call on the Yemeni authorities and others involved in the conflict to respect their obligations. They must protect civilians and ensure their access to basic services. We cannot risk the situation becoming a catastrophe,” stressed Ms. Bragg.