UN Humanitarian Chief Mission to Haiti, Panama at Start of Hurricane Season

(Panama City, 5 July 2018): United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock completed today a three-day mission to the Republic of Haiti and the Republic of Panama.

“It was important for me to undertake this mission now – at the start of the hurricane season – to see for myself the Government-led and regional efforts to prepare for natural disasters,” Mr. Lowcock said, at the end of what was his first visit to Haiti and Panama. “I was briefed on the ongoing preparedness efforts, which need sustained support.”

Upon arrival in Haiti on 3 July, Mr. Lowcock travelled to the Nord-Est Department to assess the response to successive natural disasters, and listened to people still struggling to move beyond them. “Too many Haitians have suffered terribly from acts of nature in this decade. After an earthquake, hurricanes, floods and recurring drought, Haitians’ remarkable resilience has been proven. But it is no surprise that after these successive blows, and despite joint efforts of the Government and the international community, a very sizable number of Haitians still require assistance – not only to obtain life’s necessities, but also to build livelihoods and become more resilient to future threats.”

In Nord-Est’s capital, Fort Liberté, he visited the Departmental Emergency Operations Centre. “I was impressed by the foresight and dedication of officials working to prepare and respond to natural disasters. They are making a difference, with the support of the United Nations and its partners, but we need to stay the course and continue preparations,” he said.

In Ouanaminthe, Mr. Lowcock visited a border resource centre and a host centre, where trained staff provide assistance and protection services to returnees and deportees from the Dominican Republic, including children who have been separated from their parents. On the same day, a 15-year-old girl and her mother were reunited at the centre after ten years apart.

Mr. Lowcock also met people living with disabilities who receive assistance at a local organization, many of whose dedicated staff also have disabilities. “I met 13-year-old Keffthara, who has been receiving appropriately adapted schooling for her development and return to the education system. I will bring the stories of Haitians I met to the Global Disability Summit in London on 23-24 July,” Mr. Lowcock said.

In meetings with Government officials in Port-au-Prince, Mr. Lowcock reiterated the support of the United Nations and its partners to the Government’s disaster preparedness efforts. He commended the Government for its commitment to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable Haitians, who include people across the country who struggle every day to find enough food to eat. He also reiterated the UN’s commitment to support Government efforts to eradicate cholera in Haiti.
Mr. Lowcock thanked donors for the generous support they have provided to Haiti over the years, but highlighted that the Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan is only nine per cent funded this year. “More money is needed for life-saving assistance and protection for more than two million Haitians this year,” he said.

In Panama, the UN humanitarian chief met with the Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Isabel de Saint Malo de Alverado, and other Government officials to discuss Panama’s critical role in strengthening humanitarian action in the region. He also met with regional development and humanitarian partners, and reiterated UN support for regional preparedness efforts.

He highlighted that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs plays an important role in supporting regional operational readiness to respond to crises, including by providing specialized staff to help coordinate the response when a disaster hits – or is about to hit – in the case of predictable disasters like hurricanes.

On 6 July, the Emergency Relief Coordinator will brief UN Member States in New York on hurricane preparedness efforts in the region.

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