## **GAZA: Commit to a ceasefire to protect the children**

**http://www.un.org/children/conflict/pr/2008-12-31202.html**

**New York, 31 December 2008** – Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, calls on all parties to commit to an immediate ceasefire. Though she condemns the continuous indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel, she deplores the Israeli offensive in Gaza that has resulted in so many civilian casualties, many of whom are children. “The use of disproportionate force is not a solution”, the Special Representative said.

“The situation in Gaza is unbearable for the civilian population and especially for children. They are trapped within the conflict and deprived of their fundamental human rights.  Children are victims of the bombings and traumatized by the escalation of violence. The access to humanitarian aid, basic services, education, and medical assistance is severely hampered,” said Ms. Coomaraswamy.

The Special Representative urges all parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and to respect the separation of combatants from civilians as well as the rule of proportionality in the use of force. “Both these fundamental cornerstones of the law have been developed over the centuries for the protection of women and children. It is crucial that all parties to the conflict adhere by these principles,” she stated.

Ms. Coomaraswamy reiterated her call to the Palestinian groups to take all necessary measures to prevent the involvement of children in political violence. She announced her intention to visit the region to follow-up on previous commitments in this regard.