Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes, OHR:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Before we go on to statement I would like to refer your attention to the sign in sheet that you are signing at this press conference. Recently we had some problems, as some people believe it to be the injury to their privacy if they sign their name. We think it is OK that, if you know who we all are here, we also know who you are in the audience. Especially because we here do not have such a strict regime as it is in Sarajevo, concerning accreditation and the access to the conference room. So I ask once again for your understanding regarding this issue.

We have one important thing that we would like to stress this morning.

The OHR is pleased that finally the Cantonal Government is in action. However subsequent relevant developments do not bode well for this government. First, the imminent resignation of the Prime Minister to take up another political position is regretted.

Second, equally important, we have noted that, although there has been some progress on the budget that was accepted by the C7 Government, it is not a fully unified one. We will actively engage the responsible government authorities on this issue and remind them of commitments made during the formation of the Government. Integration, neither economically nor politically, can be achieved without unified accounts.

Third, the Cantonal Budget shows a substantial deficit. In that light it is strange to find on the budget huge amounts that are allocated for items and activities whose priority is unclear in the light of the economic situation of the canton.

And I would just like to remind of today's session of the Municipal Council in Stolac. The OHR expects that the leading positions, Head of Municipality and the President of the Municipal Council, will be nominated today. We expect that in Stolac the authorities will fully function in accordance with the obligations of the councilors, the laws, and of course the Constitution.

As my colleagues from OSCE and SFOR do not have any statements, but are here only to answer your questions, we go on to Stefo on behalf of the UNMIBH.

Stefo Lehmann, UNMIBH:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it's nice to back in Mostar one more time. We have two points for you today.

Capljina Police Administration and UN IPTF recently received a visit from HVIDRA representatives who protested the removal of certain national symbols from the Police Administration building. They have issued a statement accusing the Acting Police Chief of removing their symbols. UNMIBH would like to take this opportunity and to remind the public that these symbols were removed based on the Decision issued by the High Representative in 1999. This Decision states that public institutions, particularly the Ministries of Interior and of Justice must be strictly impartial and must be perceived to be serving citizens of all ethnic groups. Therefore, it should be obvious why police and court buildings cannot display symbols which only represent one ethnic group. This must be fully understood by the citizens of this multi-ethnic society. This had been issue about a year ago I think, and we thought that we have resolved it, but obviously it came up again, so we would like to reiterate that point.

The second point we have regards the "one City one Police" project. The citizens of Mostar will soon have a single Police Administration serving the entire city instead of six separate six Police Administrations. It will be an efficient, impartial and modern European Police Service serving all the citizens of Mostar. The citizens of Mostar can thank

our Governors, Prime Ministers, City Mayors and Ministers of Interior for their strong support of this project. They are working hard to give Mostar a modern European City Police Service. This is an example of good local Government that truly serves and protects the interests of people and the future generations. However, this important service needs the immediate attention of Mostarians. The citizens of Mostar need to ensure that their representatives in the Cantonal Government and Assembly urgently pass the necessary amendments to Cantonal Law in order to make this project a reality this year. Mostarians must get involved in order to have a more efficient police force for a better future for you and for you children in Mostar.

And finally I'd like to conclude by presenting to you my replacement. The UN will now be represented at the press conferences by Kirsten Haupt, who is sitting in the back row down there. She will not be dedicated only to public affairs work, she will be 50% public affairs, but technically speaking she is an Civil Affairs Officer. But she has been in the greater region since 1994, she speaks Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, she worked in Vukovar, Zagreb, Tuzla, Trebinje and Kosovo. She is an expert on the issues here and she is of German nationality. You will now be able to direct your questions to Kirsten Haupt.

QUESTIONS AND ASNWERS:

Marko Antonio Brkic, BH Radio 1: I would like Avis to clarify what are the items from the budget, according to your assessment, which are inadmissible due to the economic and political situation in the canton? I am interested to hear if you think that someone should be held responsible for the construction of the final joint budget.

Avis Benes, OHR: Firstly, we did not say these items were inadmissible, let me remind once again what we said:" it is strange to find on the budget huge amounts that are allocated for items and activities whose priority is unclear in the light of the economic situation of the canton." So you will agree that there is a great difference. In any case, this budget is a public document and by this we wanted to draw your attention, so that you as journalists would pay more attention to an important document like this one, but in this moment we would not like to say more.

Mirsad Behram, RTV Mostar: You stated that this budget is not a joint one yet. Can you explain what you mean, how it is not a joint budget. I have one information, for which I cannot claim that is 100% correct, but my information says that it is the same situation in the City Administration, where the Mayor and Deputy Mayor just formally sign some items. Did you think that this was not a unified budget in this way, or if you did not mean it like that, what did you mean?

Avis Benes, OHR: I said that there was some progress made on adoption of this budget, and one of them was a step forward compared to the previous situation. That is that now, the salary basis will be same for everyone. However, although I say that it is nominally unified, there still are two depository accounts for collecting revenues, so it is not a unified budget in the real sense. There are also a certain number of accounts for certain expenses. So this still makes it have a division and not being completely unified budget. However, OHR will, as I said, work on that, and we will make aware of the obligations of all those who are in charge of this issue.

Pejo Gasparevic, HINA: I have a question for MR. Lehmann. It is known that there are a lot of objections from the international community on the work of the local intelligence services in the Federation, that they did not contribute enough to the fight against terrorism. The Deputy Minister of Interior, Mr. Limov said that the intelligence data on terrorism was mostly received from the western intelligence services. What does the UN Mission and IPTF expect from the future local intelligence services and in favor of which legal regulations do you stand for?

Stefo Lehmann, UNMIBH: I can not get into the legal regulations as I am not familiar with the legal regulations. The fact is that the two intelligence services AID and the SNS have been spending more time on working against each other and collecting information on each other instead of working together to protect the interests of the Federation and the state. So we feel that it would be important and certainly more efficient for them to find a way to work together in a more integrated fashion. If you want to clarify what Mr. Limov said, then you should contact Mr. Limov with regard to the sources that he has. The UN Mission itself has not received any information from the western intelligence services.

Faruk Kajtaz, Radio X: So you stated that the budget is unclear and that it is not unified. What will OHR do about this issue, besides drawing the attention of the people. I know that the OHR has a whole range of measures. How

can this document be legally valid if it is unclear?

Avis Benes, OHR: We said that the priority was unclear, and the document itself is rather clear. But in the part of your question, you have basically answered what I am about to tell you. At this moment for sure we will not go into details about our actions, but definitely we wanted to warn of this issue and say that we welcome the fact that the Government was assembled, that the budget was passed, but still this is not good enough for the OHR.