Statement of the Contact Group, Washington, DC, 8/1/1998

Contact Group Meeting

Statement on Kosovo

Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group countries meeting in New York on 24 September voiced their deep concern over tensions in Kosovo and called on the authorities in Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community to join in a peaceful dialogue.

At the Bonn Peace Implementation Council on 9/10 December, the Council took note with increasing concern of escalating tensions in Kosovo. The decision by the delegation of the FRY to leave the PIC meeting did nothing to diminish this concern.

Against this background, Contact Group Political Directors, meeting in Washington on 8 January, indicated that the Contact Group would continue to focus on Kosovo as a matter of high priority. The following principles underlay the Contact Group's continued interest in the situation in Kosovo:

- it is for the authorities in Belgrade and the leadership of Kosovar Albanian community to assume their responsibility to promote stability and a solution to the problems between them in order to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for their people. The Contact Group will support a mutually agreed solution that respects democratic standards;
- as a first step to reduce tensions, it is essential that dialogue begins;
- the Contact Group supports neither independence nor the maintenance of the status quo. It supports an enhanced status for Kosovo within the FRY. Such a status should fully protect the rights of the Albanian, Serb, and other residents of Kosovo in accordance with OSCE standards, Helsinki principles and the UN Charter;
- the Contact Group condemns both violent repression of non-violent expressions of political views and terrorist actions to achieve political goals, and strongly urges all sides to seek peaceful solutions to their difficulties;
- we call on the FRY to address this question urgently. Making concrete progress to resolve the serious political and human rights issues in Kosovo is critical for Belgrade to improve its international position and relations with the international community.

To facilitate dialogue, the Contact Group has decided to consider further the Kosovo issue and, in particular, how to support existing efforts to implement the Education Agreement, which would be an important first step towards the promotion of stability. It will draw on the views of all those that have been working to resolve the problems of Kosovo.

Office of the High Representative