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

Contact Group Meeting

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The Contact Group, meeting in Washington, DC on January 8, welcomes the conclusions of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Ministerial in Bonn and expects all Bosnian authorities to work diligently to rapidly implement the action program set forth in the PIC conclusions. Further temporising will not be tolerated.

Bosnian leaders must urgently reach agreement on a series of important issues to promote the welfare of the Bosnian people. If the Bosnian leaders are unable to agree, we support the full use of the High Representative's authority to resolve outstanding issues and accelerate peace implementation under Dayton and Bonn PIC conference provisions. The Contact Group welcomes the High Representative's use of his authority under Dayton to provide an interim solution to the issue of the citizenship law. As a next step, we support efforts by the High Representative to develop a binding process for selecting a new Bosnian flag and common licence plate, should the parties fail to come to agreement.

The Contact Group calls on the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to immediately propose new Ambassadors per the Presidency agreement in August and to formally request "agreement" from host capitals. The Contact Group welcomes the High Representative's intention to make recommendations to the PIC Steering Board in January for action by PIC governments if this step has not been taken.

The Contact Group is concerned by the slow pace of implementation of municipal election results. Local authorities in both Entities must dramatically accelerate the formation of new municipal governments or face international measures. We request that the OSCE and the High Representative report to the January meeting of the PIC Steering Board on the status of election implementation in each municipality and propose steps to achieve faster implementation.

The RS Assembly elections on November 22-23 represented a welcome step in the process of furthering democracy and political pluralism in the Republika Srpska and beyond that in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. Delay in forming a new government serves only to prolong the period the people of Republika Srpska have to wait before their elected representatives begin seriously to tackle the formidable political and economic problems that face the Entity.

The Contact Group urges that a new Prime Minister be confirmed at the next session of the Republika Srpska Assembly, scheduled for January 12, so that a new Republika Srpska government, committed to full Dayton implementation and co-operation with the High Representative and the international community, can be established within the time-frame set out in the Republika Srpska Constitution. The full engagement of the international community, including economic support, in the development of Republika Srpska as a prosperous Entity within a united Bosnia depends on formation of a new, pro-Dayton government. The Contact Group expects Belgrade to use its influence to support the creation of such a government in the Republika Srpska as part of its responsibilities as a regional guarantor of Dayton.

The Contact Group condemns the actions by members of the outgoing Republika Srpska government, in direct contravention to the express will of the majority of the Assembly delegates, to prevent the live broadcast of the inaugural session of the new Assembly. These actions were a blatant attempt to prevent the citizens of the Republika Srpska from participating in the political life of their entity. We call on the Bosnian broadcast media to reject such unwarranted political interference and to broadcast fully the next session of the Assembly, scheduled for January 12.
We support steps by the High Representative to ensure that these broadcasts take place.

The Contact Group demands that the relevant Bosnian-Serb authorities immediately return the equipment that has

been removed illegally from the SRT network and immediately begin full co-operation with the OHR to institute professional, unbiased broadcast media in the Republika Srpska.

The Contact Group is concerned by the slow progress on minority returns in both Entities. An important element in promoting returns is adequate legislation on property restitution. We are disappointed that the Federation has not passed the OHR proposed relevant property legislation and call on it to immediately do so. We also expect that the new Republika Srpska government will rapidly pass similar legislation. The proposed conference on returns to Sarajevo presents an important opportunity to accelerate the process of restoring Sarajevo to its multi-ethnic heritage.

The Contact Group welcomed the briefings by Roberts Owen, the presiding officer of the Brcko Arbitral Tribunal, and Ambassador Farrand, Brcko Supervisor, and expressed full support for both their efforts. We specifically commend the work of Ambassador Farrand and his staff and note the positive developments in Brcko since the interim arbitral decision, including the beginnings of refugee and DP returns and the substantial progress toward a multi-ethnic administration and an integrated, joint police force and judiciary. Overall, however, progress has been far too slow and all parties must dramatically improve co-operation with the Supervisor. All the parties are obligated to participate fully in deliberations of the Arbitral Tribunal, including the Vienna hearings, and to implement the March Arbitral decision.

The Contact Group recognises with appreciation the work of the UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, which will end its mission on January 15. The Contact Group notes that the process of national reconciliation will require the sustained efforts of the Croatian government and the Croatian Serb community. We will look to the Croatian government in particular to take all steps necessary to accelerate the returns of all DPs and refugees to their homes throughout Croatia.

The Contact Group takes a close interest in the democratic process in Montenegro. Taking into account the conclusions of OSCE technical mission, the Contact Group notes that the October 19 presidential elections in Montenegro were deemed relatively free and fair, with results that reflect the will of the Montenegrin people. The Contact Group recognises the right of the elected President to assume office as scheduled on January 15 and calls upon all parties to exercise restraint and avoid violence.

Office of the High Representative