

Human Rights Report 16-22 June 97

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

UN IPTF Removes Illegal Checkpoints On 17 June, UN IPTF dismantled an illegal police checkpoint in Gornji Rahic Brcko (Fed). UN IPTF observed local police stopping vehicles with registration plates from other areas even though no traffic violations had occurred, indicating a freedom of movement violation. When UN IPTF told the policemen that they were conducting an illegal checkpoint, the police left the area. On 16 June, UN IPTF removed another illegal checkpoint near Mrkonjic Grad (RS), a common entry point for inter-entity travellers through the "Anvil" region in RS.

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT / EXPRESSION / ASSOCIATION

MEC Rules on Polikita Case The OSCE's Media Experts Commission (MEC) ruled on the case of the 5 June seizure of the satirical magazine Polikita during its 13 June session. The MEC found that the authorities had violated Article 127.1 of the Provisional Elections Commission (PEC) Rules and Regulations under which they are responsible for ensuring that *"no obstacle impedes freedom of expression and of the media, including the printing, distribution and sale of publications."* The MEC concluded that all confiscated copies of the magazine should be returned to the kiosks from which they were taken, all court actions threatened by the authorities against Polikita or the kiosks vendors will be terminated, and the authorities and police officials connected with the confiscation shall be required to attend a lecture on media rights arranged by the MEC.

OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

UNESCO Calls for Preservation of Religious Monuments On 17 June, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held a press conference to condemn attacks on religious monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Director General Frederico Mayor said *"every shot targeting cultural and religious monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, over and above material damage, constitutes an attack on the principle of a multicultural society which is at the heart of the Bosnian state."* According to UNESCO, hundreds of churches and mosques were deliberately destroyed during the war and some attacks have continued since the signature of the Peace Agreement. Last week, international human rights monitors reported that a Islamic cemetery near Teslic (RS) was vandalised and that an Orthodox cemetery in the Capljina (Fed) area was also desecrated earlier in the month. In Banja Luka (RS), OSCE and UNESCO are working with the Islamic Community to ensure the protection of graveyards and other properties allocated to the Islamic Community following a number of complaints, including one citing the use of a graveyard for grazing animals.

RIGHT TO RETURN

NGO Conference on Returnee Rights to be Held in Zenica The Center for Legal Assistance for Women, in cooperation with USAID-OTI, is organising a conference on the rights of displaced persons and returnees from 27 – 29 June in Zenica. The primary goal of the conference is to bring together non-governmental organisations working in the fields of human rights and legal assistance to enable them to establish mutual cooperation; exchange information on housing, property, labour legislation and its

application in both entities; and to identify ways to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons.

INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Federation Ombudsmen Inaugurate Children's Rights Department The Federation Ombudsmen opened a Department of their office specifically devoted to Children's Rights on 16 June in Sarajevo (Fed). At a press conference held to announce the opening, Federation Ombudsman Branka Raguz said that the new department was established to promote the protection of children's rights as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights. Raguz said the department will first strive to create linkages among organisations engaged in children's rights issues in the country. She also noted that the department will concentrate its activities in Sarajevo Canton during the first year, and will expand its scope to the entire Federation during the next five years.

DISS Holds Annual Session The Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs (DISS) held its second annual meeting in Ilidza on 11 June. Representatives of local non-governmental organizations, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Displaced Persons and Refugees, and international organizations attended. DISS members provided an update on the work of the association and briefed participants on the human rights situation in the Sarajevo area. The Principal Deputy High Representative Ambassador Steiner attended the session and spoke about human rights conditions since the transfer of authority, which he views as improved, but still not perfect. DISS is a non-governmental organisation established by members of the Serb community who remained in the Federation after the transfer of authority of the Sarajevo suburbs in early 1996. DISS's main aim is to help protect the human rights of these citizens and to promote their interests the Federation.

UNHCR Targets "Open Cities" for Returnees On 19 June, UNHCR's Special Envoy, Carrol Faubert, announced a new strategy for return of minorities called "Open Cities," a program that provides rapid reconstruction aid to those cities that encourage, accept and fully integrate minority returnees. UNHCR is cooperating with other international organisations which have human rights monitors in the field to ensure that "Open Cities" live up to their commitments to uphold the human rights of minority returnees. Thus far, UNHCR has received propositions from 25 municipalities prepared to participate. UNHCR hopes the first city to participate will be Gornji Vakuf (Fed). Faubert said that UNHCR's background work on "Open Cities" has demonstrated that *"that ordinary people are much more open than their leaders"* and repatriation must be addressed at the grassroots level in order to circumvent officials who are often *"real political dinosaurs."* Some 800,000 out of 1.2 million Bosnians refugees are still overseas. A further 800,000 people out of 1.1 million displaced by the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still homeless. Of the 250,000 Bosnian refugees who returned last year, very few returned to areas where they are ethnic minorities. The most significant exception to this trend is the 2,000-3,000 Serb returnees to Sarajevo.

NOTE: The HR Report is based on the most recent information available to the OHR from inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. Questions on specific items should be directed to the reporting organisation or to the HRCC. Please send information for inclusion in the report to 387-71-447-420, attention Leah Melnick (leah.melnick@ohr.int), Kristina Koch (kristina.koch@ohr.int), or Vladimir Staniscic (vladimir.staniscic@ohr.int).

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