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PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Minorities in Teslic Face Increasing Pressure UN IPTF monitors in Teslic (RS) are following up on a case in which a Croat woman's house was damaged by an explosive device on 23 May, and on a complaint from a Croat man on 16 May that a Serb man threatened to burn down his home. On 20 May, a Bosniak returnee from Germany who went to register with the local police upon his arrival to town was detained at the police station overnight for questioning about his war time activities. UN IPTF protested the detention to the Teslic police authorities and noted that the man was not provided with food or water during the 24 hours that he was at the station. International monitors also reported that members of the "Civil Protection Unit" intimidated two Bosniak families in the area on 7 May, assaulted a male member of one of the families and threatened to rape the daughters of the other. Monitors believe that the threats and intimidation are an attempt to get the families to leave their property. At around the same time, a journalist working for an independent publication in the RS told human rights monitors that he had been threatened by an influential religious leader in the area after he published several articles about the situation in Teslic. Both the UN Special Rapporteur Elisabeth Rehn and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in BiH have expressed concern about the situation of minorities in the municipality and said that deteriorating conditions could result in the departure of Bosniaks and Croats from Teslic. Approximately 1,600 Bosniaks and a lesser number of Croats live in about eight villages in the area. Human rights observers are closely monitoring the situation.

Helsinki Committee Visits Bugojno On 26 May, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights BiH and members of the Helsinki Federation (accompanied by OHR/HRCC), carried out a mission to Bugojno (Fed) during which they met with the Mayor, representatives of opposition political parties, and 70 Croat residents of the municipality. In a press release issued after the visit, the Helsinki Committee stated that implementation of the Peace Agreement, especially as regards minority returns, continues to be blocked by the Bugojno authorities through linkages of reciprocity, and noted that the completion of the pilot project for the return of 200 Croat families to Bugojno is an exception to the general practice of blocking returns. The Helsinki Committee stated that the situation for the approximately 2,000 Croats and 300 Serbs in Bugojno continues to be difficult in many respects, and that the dire economic situation and low employment levels particularly effect minority citizens. Human rights observers have recorded a number of human rights violations against minorities in Bugojno which the local authorities have allegedly failed to properly investigate or prevent, including destruction of property, illegal evictions, non-reinstatement of rightful property inhabitants, threats, intimidation and in one case, an assault by a police officer.

OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Ombudsperson Issues Banja Luka Report On 15 May, the Human Rights Ombudsperson for BiH issued a Special Report on the Non-enforcement of Judicial Decisions in Banja Luka regarding 21 cases in April in which RS police failed to carry out court-ordered evictions to facilitate reinstatement of the rightful inhabitants. All 21 cases involve Bosniak families that had been displaced from their homes during the war, but that have remained in the Banja Luka area. Approximately 300 minority familes in the city are in a similar situation. The Ombudsperson concluded that the failure of the Banja Luka police to assist the judicial authorities in executing the evictions contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights and the Peace Agreement. She recommended that the RS Ministers of Interior and Justice transmit to her in writing by 7 June their commitment to restore the individuals to their respective homes and to provide her with a description of the procedure that the authorities will

follow to ensure that this occurs.

Human Rights Organisations Press for Mostar Reinstatements On 19 May, the OHR, UNHCR, OSCE and the Deputy Federation Ombudsman met with the Mayors of east and west Mostar (Fed) to discuss, among other issues, the reinstatement of the first five of the 82 families that were illegally evicted from their homes in 1996. Despite the west Mostar Mayor's refusal to cooperate with the initiative, UNHCR and the Deputy Federation Ombudsman wrote to the west Mostar housing authorities on 20 May to inform them of the reinstatement procedures for the five families and of the actions that will be taken should they refuse to comply within the given time limits. OHR and other international organisations in Mostar issued a joint press statement on 23 May to explain the initiative to the public, and to counter negative statements that had been made about the Deputy Federation Ombudsman in the local Croat press by expressing their full support for the Ombudsmen's Institution and its representative in Mostar, "as impartial advocates of human rights for all."

RIGHT TO RETURN

Cross IEBL Visits Hindered UN IPTF issued a non-compliance report against the Deputy Station Commander in Stolac (Fed) on 19 May for his refusal to allow five Serb women to visit family graves there. UN IPTF also received a complaint that three Serbs were threatened and one was physically maltreated by local police in Ljubuski (Fed) on 6 May when they went to visit their homes there. The police reportedly drove the three men to the IEBL and told them not to return to the Federation. Several Serbs travelling from Banja Luka and Mrkonjic Grad to Jajce (Fed) were reportedly stopped by Federation police on 17 May and told to go back to the RS because "their security could not be guaranteed in Jajce."

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT/ EXPRESSION / ASSOCIATION

Opposition Member's House Damaged A man who recently registered himself as a member of an opposition political party in Cazin (Fed) reported to international monitors that someone placed an explosive device outside his house on 25 May. Last year, international monitors documented a large number of incidents of this kind against opposition party representatives and supporters in Cazin and Velika Kladusa prior to the September elections.

INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Workshop on Cantonal Courts Held The Federation Ministry of Justice, the Association of Judges in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ABA/CEELI co-sponsored a technical legal assistance planning workshop on May 20 entitled "Developing Cantonal Courts in the Federation of BiH." Workshop participants discussed the issues faced by the cantons as they establish their judiciaries and began to develop a programme to address such issues. Participants included Cantonal Ministers of Justice, representatives of the Higher Courts from each of the cantons, the Presidents of both the Federation Supreme and Constitutional Courts, the Federation Prosecutors' Association, and members of the international community. Federation Minister of Justice Tadic emphasised that in order to establish an effective and integral legal system in the Federation, certain reforms should be made to de-politicise and increase the transparency of the judicial appointment process, to develop a system for financing the courts, and to operationalise the judicial police. As an outcome of the workshop, a working group comprised of Federation lawyers, judges and representatives of the cantonal Ministries of Justice will be formed to draft a proposal to reform the cantonal judicial appointment process. The group has the support of the Federation Ministry of Justice, will be led by the Association of Judges in the Federation, and will receive technical support from ABA/CEELI.

Coalition Opens Information Office On 27 May, the Coalition for Return opened its first information office, located at

the “Vladimir Nazor” primary school in Sarajevo. In his address at the opening ceremony, Principal Deputy High Representative Ambassador Steiner expressed his belief that the office will become a central point for organising the Coalition, which he said had grown from a series of meetings in Mostar, Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Modrica, Bosanski Petrovac and Tuzla into a grass-roots movement throughout the country as “a focal point where the energy which had been growing would be channelled into result.” The Coalition for Return, with a current membership of 136 domestic and 46 international refugee organisations, provides a voice for hundreds of people who wish to return home and also serves as a forum for the exchange of information and mutual assistance. The Coalition plans to open additional information offices in Tuzla, Banja Luka and Mostar. It will also increase its representation and participation in international refugee conferences and establish a Coalition website on the Internet, a self-help home repair programme, and a legal aid service for refugees and displaced persons. Ambassador Steiner also told the group that the opening of the Sarajevo office will help realise these goals by broadening the Coalition’s network and will further the principles of coexistence of the country’s citizens, including their right to return. The Office is located at Aziza Sacirbegovic 80, tel: 652227, fax: 652237.

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 Stanisic(vladimir.stanisic@ohr.int).*

Office of the High Representative