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Sarajevo, 28 June 2000 – A draft Freedom of Information Law (FOI), which will help lay the legal foundations of a more open society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was announced today by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the OSCE mission here.

Under the draft FOI legislation every member of the public will have the right to access information held by government and other public bodies. The new law aims to put as much information as possible into the publicąs hands at the lowest reasonable cost. It also gives individuals the right to amend or correct their personal information and to attach a commentary to it.

Freedom of information is vital for the greater transparency and accountability of public authorities, an essential democratic right which has real, everyday applications from enhancing the mediaąs ability to gain accurate information on government activities to accelerating economic reform by creating more transparent financial and budgetary practices in government and public businesses in BiH.

The draft legislation was developed in response to the July 30, 1999 Decision of the High Representative that called for the adoption of FOI legislation at the State and Entity levels that would uphold the highest international standards. This Decision was issued in order to ensure the right to freedom of expression in BiH as provided for in the Constitution of BiH. The Decision is supported by the Peace Implementation Council which in its 16 December 1998 Madrid Declaration urged the adoption of FOI legislation in BiH.

The High Representative decision stipulated that the legislation should be prepared under the guidance of the OHR, the OSCE and legal experts. Consequently, the OHR and the OSCE Mission established the *Advisory Group on Defamation and Freedom of Information Legislation*. Comprised of national and international experts, nominees of the BiH governments and representatives of the OHR, the OSCE Mission, and the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the Advisory Group reviewed the draft FOI legislation for the State and Entity Levels.

Members of state and entity governments, representatives of the media and political parties have been briefed about the proposed draft law. A series of public meetings have been planned immediately following the public release of the drafts. The meetings will allow for comment from members of the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civic groups, legal practitioners and members of local government. Copies of the draft FOI legislation can also be accessed at http://www.oscebih.org.

Office of the High Representative