

Statement by the High Representative, Carl Bildt, for TVBiH

Tonight, I want to emphasize that all people can stay in Sarajevo. I know that four years of war have created a great deal of distrust and fear that cannot be removed in the sixty days since the peace agreement was signed. But this is no reason for Sarajevans to leave their city.

One of the most positive results of the Rome summit was the Declaration on Sarajevo. The Presidents and Prime Ministers reaffirmed the Dayton Agreement, stating that Sarajevo will be a unified city with equal treatment for all citizens. The Rome Declaration appealed for all to stay while calling for "equal opportunity and non-discrimination for all peoples and citizens of Sarajevo, as well as for all citizens of all regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. "

As the transition of the suburbs of Sarajevo to the Federation progresses, even the first appearance of Federation police could increase the fears of Serbs in these areas. This is why I want to talk to you tonight. The transition to Federation police will begin on February 23 in Vogosca and neighboring areas with other opstine to follow approximately every six days. The Federation Police will not come alone. They will be under the supervision of International police who will require them to comply with accepted international procedures. Practically, this means that the Federation police cannot search any homes without International Police present. They will report any arrests immediately to the International Police who will be present in all police stations. The Federation Police will include Serbs, Bosniacs, Croats, and Others. And do not forget, there now exists a general amnesty.

In the next few weeks, many families will be facing a difficult decision: whether or not to remain in their homes as areas in and around Sarajevo become part of the Federation. Leaving a place where one has lived many years, where one's family is buried, is not a decision to be taken hastily. There will be full freedom of movement in both directions. You can live here and work there or the other way around. All routes to and from the Republika Srpska will remain open in Vogosca, in Ilidza, everywhere. This freedom will not end next Friday or on March 20. Thus, families have all the time they want to make this most difficult decision~ they can see how the new situation will be.

You want to know what will happen in Sarajevo. I can say that the Dayton Agreement and the Rome Statement guarantee equal treatment, representation in local government, also for Serbs, and education in one's own language and alphabet. Everyone will have full political and human rights; No one, including refugees and displaced persons can be required to leave their present accommodations without being offered an alternative. IFOR will maintain an enhanced presence in these areas to contribute to the general security.

At the same time some evil-minded people are saying that everyone must leave their homes. This is not true, and it is a criminal act to try to make someone leave against his will. As people say here: "Ne dajte da vam iko kroji sudbinu." No one should be able to tell you what to decide. Not the Federation, not anybody else, no one. With the routes to and from Sarajevo remaining open, you will have enough time to decide.

We have worked on all of this together with your local representatives. If you want information, ask them. You can ask them for the text of the amnesty and all the official documents we have worked on in the Joint Civilian Commission Sarajevo.

To summarize the main points: First, Sarajevo will be a unified city with equal treatment for all. Second, Federation Police under the supervision of International Police will begin to operate in areas becoming part of the Federation on February 23. The Federation Police will have strict rules based on international practice and will be closely monitored by the International Police. There will be increased IFOR presence. Third, people who may be considering leaving their homes have time to see how the situation will be before making such a drastic decision. Fourth, all routes to and from the Republika Srpska will remain open, even after March 20. Fifth, it is a criminal act to try to force anyone to leave his home. Everyone should be free to choose.

I will end by quoting the Rome statement of Presidents Izetbegovic, Milosevic, and Zubak and Prime Ministers Muratovic and Kasagic. "We are determined to work for the reconciliation and peaceful living together in Sarajevo. We appeal to all to stay in the city, and rest assured that their legitimate rights will be taken into account."

I invite the present and former mayors of Sarajevo to join us in this appeal.