

Transcript of the Press Conference held in London

FOREIGN SECRETARY:Ladies and Gentleman, this has been a successful conference, it has also been a realistic conference. We have reviewed peace implementation in Bosnia in 1996, both the successes and the areas where we have made insufficient progress. The main challenge was to agree an action plan for 1997 to make the peace work and this has been accomplished.

Before setting out the main themes of the plan, could I highlight one ground-breaking aspect of this event. It is symbolic but I think that you will understand the symbolism. For the first time ever, all the representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the three members of the Presidency, the Acting Foreign Minister and the leaders of the two entities, the Federation and the Republika Srpska, sat together at an international meeting behind a Bosnia and Herzegovina nameplate. It is symbolic but it is a significant step forward and we hope it is translated into practical cooperation in Bosnia itself.

Let me now identify the two main themes of the conference. First of all the participation of over 50 states and international organisations was a vivid demonstration of the international community's commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's future. In his opening speech to the conference, the Prime Minister paid tribute to the tens of thousands of individuals who have lived and worked in Bosnia in 1996 and the international community's efforts on reconstruction, and that commitment will continue in 1997. But the second theme, the theme that came through repeatedly in the interventions, was conditionality. Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders can be in no doubt that the international community's willingness to devote further human and financial resources to their country is dependent - dependent - upon a strengthened commitment from them to implementation of the peace agreement in all areas.

Let me identify a few points from what is a detailed, precise and practical action plan for Bosnia for 1997. We are strengthening the International Police Task Force, both its resources and its powers. I indicated yesterday that the United Kingdom is providing up to 30 British police officers for the force. We have agreed that in 1997 the force will be able to conduct independent investigation of human rights abuses and require prompt and immediate action by the Bosnia authorities if local police officers are obstructing the IPTF's activities or otherwise abusing their position. In the past, of course, any alleged abuses by local police had to be investigated by the local police and that did not give the confidence that is required.

Dealing effectively with war crimes is an urgent moral and political requirement and we are strengthening the International Criminal Tribunal, enhancing information sharing and information gathering so that the Tribunal has its own ability to identify the location and the circumstances of alleged war criminals, and that we hope will lead to improved opportunities for apprehension. The United Kingdom, along with others, will be sending additional help to the Tribunal who will work in this area. I hope that others will match this commitment of new resources.

We are also in the agreement approved today insisting on practical measures to increase freedom of movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnians have agreed to an integrated telephone system from Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is extraordinary that that does not exist. You cannot ring Pale from Sarajevo, that has been a political problem as well as a practical one. That has now been agreed that that will be changed.

Common air space. A single national car number plate system, a trivial point but one also which is relevant to the reconstruction of a single country. A Bosnia-wide bus and rail services. These practical commitments add up to a trend, a direction, which is one that is important and which will be of significance to the lives of ordinary Bosnian people.

The international community has made it clear that reconstruction assistance in these areas is conditional upon the Bosnians following up on these commitments.

We have agreed on a programme of measures to encourage refugee return. You will be aware that about a quarter of a million refugees have so far returned, but around 2 million have not.

And we have mapped out a programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic regeneration involving the construction of a market economy, a legal framework for budgets and an IMF stabilisation programme.

Finally, there are commitments to strengthening a free and independent media in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Before I invite Carl Bildt to make a few comments, could I mention one other theme that has emerged during the conference although it was not intended to be part of its formal agenda. There is widespread concern that was expressed during the conference at recent developments in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and in particular the closing down of independent media and other matters relating to the recent elections. These events did cut across the spirit of reconciliation and progress at this conference. I spoke at length, as did others, to the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia about these concerns and he will take back to Belgrade a clear message about the views of the international community.

MR CARL BILDT: Could I start by saying that there has been an immense amount of work that has been undertaken by you and by your staff at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and I think that has been an extremely valuable contribution to the work that we are doing within the framework of the Peace Implementation Conference and the office of the High Representative.

I am not going to add very much, just to say that these have been two days, two good days, of hard work, of substantial commitments and of the important bridge-building on all of the major issues of the peace process in Bosnia, as well as the regional perspective which is so important. You can reflect, and several persons did, throughout this process on the change that has occurred between the different London Conferences. There was one in 1992 which paved the way for the humanitarian intervention, it saved thousands and thousands of lives and also started an effort to create peace. And then 1995, first one conference that paved the way really for the more robust response to the deteriorating military situation in Bosnia, which paved the way for the peace agreement as such in Dayton and signed in Paris; immediately after that, again in London, to see how could we lay the foundation for peace implementation.

I think the judgement of everyone at this conference is yes that succeeded, the foundation is there, but much remains to be done and now a concrete action plan for the first year of the two year consolidation phase. At the end of that phase we hope that there will be a self-sustaining peace process. In political terms, reconciliation; in economic terms, based on economic terms, based on economic reforms; humanitarian with most of the refugees having come back to the places of their origin or where they intend or choose to go. So it is a record of gradual progress towards peace and stability in the region.

As the Foreign Secretary said, the situation in Serbia has been the cause of both public comments and private discussions and most particularly, although not only, the B92 situation. Foreign Minister Milutinovic has just virtually assured me that B92 will be back on the air as soon as some problems, whatever those were, had been sorted out. I said fine, but I would like to see it, or more precisely, I would like to hear it before I am going to say anything positive about it. But the fact that they have felt the pressure, they feel that they will have to change track, is as such good. But as I say, we will need to hear it before we will believe it.

QUESTION: In the light of our remarks about the situation in Belgrade, do you consider a visit this summer by your predecessor as British Foreign Secretary to Belgrade, to see Milosevic, in his role as a banker to be a diplomatic, and prudent and proper thing for a former Foreign Secretary to do ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY: If I may say so, the attempt to establish some link between what happened this summer and what has happened in the last few days is absurd, I don't understand the point that you are trying to make. The concern we are expressing is the controversy over the events of the last few days and the apparent response of the authorities in Belgrade to recent elections and the closing down of a radio station. What that has got to do with the visit of a banker a few months ago to Belgrade, only your rather convoluted reasoning could explain.

QUESTION: ... the problem is, or what Mr Rifkind said just a moment ago, is that you are trying to put pressure on the authorities in Belgrade to make them behave more sensibly and for example to get B92 back on the air. How is that process to happen if the man ... only a few months ago was visiting Milosevic...

FOREIGN SECRETARY: The fact is that there are no sanctions being pursued against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The sanctions have been removed in the light of the international agreements. It is the common objective of all countries to see economic progress, economic development in the country. No-one wishes to see a bankrupt Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I am not aware that that is the view of any government at this moment in time. And therefore it is entirely proper that at a time when there are no sanctions being enforced, those in the commercial and business community should be encouraged to develop economic activity, it is in all their interests

to do so and I am surprised I have to explain it to you.

MR BILDT: I find the question rather bizarre, because I don't think that you can just isolate, you need to talk, and of course there has been a steady stream of visitors to Belgrade. And if you make a breakdown of the nationality of those I am not quite certain where you arrive. But of course you engage the machine in Belgrade on the issues of the Bosnian peace process and on the business of the necessary internal reform of the country, both economic and political. And a number of people have been doing that, myself certainly not excluded. And I think that is necessary and I think that should be continued to keep the pressure up so that eventually we can pave the way, not for the isolation but the integration of Serbia into the structures of cooperation. That must be the aim and that is the way that we must work. I mean you can operate policy by producing endless press statements saying what you want to achieve, that is fine, especially for your conscience, but you must also be there to press home the points. And if you see the track record of what has been done during the past years, that is certainly the case.

QUESTION (Mike Evans, Times): Will you be satisfied, Mr Rifkind, if in 12 months from today neither Mladic nor Karadzic are at least detained and facing trial ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY: I shall be very dissatisfied, but it doesn't just apply to those two. As long as there are any indicted war criminals who have not been brought to the Tribunal to face a proper trial and a proper verdict we, not just I, but the international community as a whole will be extremely dissatisfied. That is one of the reasons why we are strengthening the resources available to the Tribunal and the efforts must continue until these results have been achieved.

QUESTION (Robert Fox, Daily Telegraph): Are you granting any extra powers of apprehension and arrest to the IPTF or any of the international security forces on the ground in Bosnia ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY: I think the legal powers already exist. If they have an opportunity to arrest persons, they can exercise that power under their present rules. We have not had any suggestion that that is a problem for them. What we have also agreed to is that they will have their own unit within Bosnia able to identify more accurately the likely location of indicted war criminals, gather information about them and generally be in a stronger position to identify the best ways of bringing these people to justice.

QUESTION: You may recall that in the early days of IFOR they said it was not a priority mission and there was even some inference that that mission would have to be tasked specifically by the UN Security Council, they would have to be given a mandate to do it. Could you clarify that please ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY: There is a continuing obligation, not just on IFOR, on all within Bosnia and Herzegovina, all the authorities whether they be the international authorities or the national government of that territory, to use any opportunity to apprehend indicted war criminals and not to by-pass that opportunity. If the opportunity presents itself, I would expect IFOR, or the police, or the local government authorities to arrest the persons concerned and bring them to justice.

MR BILDT : I am not sure if the full text is available to you, but if it is available to you, I would like to direct your attention to page 13, point 9 under this, which says: The Council charges the Steering Board to consider what further measures can be taken to facilitate the delivery of persons indicted to the Tribunal for trial. If you try to interpret that, the interpretation is of course that if things don't happen by themselves then the Steering Board - this is the first time this has been said - will consider what measures can be taken. It doesn't say which measures, and I don't think it should say that either, but it does say that further measures in order to facilitate the delivery will then be considered by the Steering Board. That has never been said before.

QUESTION : I have a question for either Mr. Rifkind or Mr. Bildt. Did you make any progress on pushing forward the arbitration process on Brcko and why did you make your remarks about Serbia here at the press conference rather than it being included in a final declaration ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY : If I may deal with your second question first, these matters were raised during the conference. They were not strictly in order because we actually have to have conclusions which are based on the terms of reference of the Peace Implementation Council and human rights abuses in Belgrade are not within the terms of reference of that so they could not be formally included in the conclusions but they were referred to both by delegations and they were referred to by myself as chairman in my summing up of the conference but beyond that we were not permitted to go.

CARL BILDT :On the Board of Arbitration, that is an independent proceeding that is going on. The thing that was a source of certain concern here was the fact that there have been some conflicting noises coming out of the Bosnian Serb side whether they participate or don't participate in the process and we very clearly made the point to them that first they have an obligation to be part of the process; secondly, it is in their interest to be part of the process; third, if they are not part of the process, the process goes ahead anyhow but it will be more difficult from their point of view and we hope that they understand that message and that they will continue to be part of the legal proceedings of the arbitration tribunal as it continues its work during the near future.

RAY MOSELEY (CHICAGO TRIBUNE) :Mr. Rifkind, a number of the points you mentioned that were agreed here were agreed at Dayton a year ago so what exactly is new and what reason do you have to believe that people are going to honour commitments that they haven't honoured in the past year and could you tell us a little more specifically about what was agreed on the return of refugees ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY :On the earlier part of your question, of course we recognised ourselves that much has been achieved since Dayton but quite a lot has not been achieved on the return of refugees and matters of that kind.

What is different is two things :

First of all, conditionality and the conditionality has not been expressed before; it has been assumed that we had an automatic requirement to provide economic help, to provide continuing military support. Neither of these should be taken for granted. There is no desire or intent or will on the part of the international community to provide some open-ended support in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The war has now been over for a year, that itself is quite a long time. We recognised that it would be irresponsible at this moment to simply withdraw that support but it is not going to go on indefinitely. If the Bosnian parties themselves were to fail to carry out their responsibilities on refugee return, on human rights issues, on the reconstruction of central institutions for the country, then I can only speak for the United Kingdom but I know that we would no longer be prepared to provide the kind of help we are providing at the moment and from the contributions that have been made during the last couple of days I am sure that also applies to other countries.

CARL BILDT :I think that 1997 will see further substantial progress on this issue but we have to understand that things take time. What I have been seeing in Bosnia during this year has been a lot of refugees coming from different western European countries having a look to see how things are; "Is my house still there ? Can it be repaired ? Are my neighbours alive ? What is the prospect of economic recovery ? Are the local thugs still around ? What is the security environment ? Do I dare to take my family back ?

We would ask those questions and a number of them have come back, a number of them are still hesitating to see what happens next year and there was also the uncertainty left that a lot of people said: "If this IFOR force goes away, is the war going to restart ? Do I dare to take my family back as long as I don't know if there is going to be a stabilisation force during the next few years ?"

When those uncertainties are gradually reduced, we will see increasing numbers of refugees taking the decision: "Yes, I will go home to my country and I will help in the rebuilding of it!" but it will take time and we will have to respect also that time element. I think all of us in a similar situation would act the same.

FOREIGN SECRETARY :I remember almost exactly a year ago after the last London Conference we were asked at just this moment of the press conference : "How can you ensure that there will not be a war breaking out again in the next few weeks or months ? How many people are going to be killed over the next year ? Can you guarantee that that will not happen ?" and of course we had to say at that time : "No, we can't guarantee it but we believe there is now a better prospect that that will happen. "Well, we have had a year and not a single person has been killed in Bosnia as a result of the conflict."

We were asked: "What are the serious prospects for the elections happening ? As part of your Conclusions, how can you be sure that they are going to happen ?" We could not be sure but the elections have happened.

We were asked: "Are there actually going to be all-Bosnia institutions created ? Do you really believe that ? Can you guarantee that out of this conference ?" and the answer had to be : "No, we can't guarantee it but that is what we are working towards and we think there is now a much better chance."

So there has been some very substantial progress and that has to be set beside the areas where there has been equally depressing lack of progress.

DAVID LJUNGGREN (REUTERS NEWS AGENCY): If I can go back one second to the point about the Steering Board and possible increased measures to take to ensure that war criminals are apprehended, Mr. Bildt, you said yesterday that if we didn't see progress on this matter in a very short time, then the Board would have to start thinking about what further measures could be taken. What constitutes a "short time", 6 months, a year?

CARL BILDt: I prefer not to define that; I think that should be defined by the Steering Board but I think I said "in the near future", whatever that means.

It has been a very strong message coming from here. That message from here will work its way through the political systems of the different entities and of the different states. They have to understand the message and what it means and then we will have to look and when we can say: "yes, they now have had the time to consider it!" and then the Steering Board will return to the issue. That is absolutely certain and that is put in writing in stone here.

QUESTION: You said that the message to foreign minister Milutinovic was very clear. Yesterday, in an interview for "Voice of America", he said that Mr. Bildt had made an excuse for getting involved in Serbian internal affairs.

CARL BILDt: That's true!

SAME LADY: And he said that you apologised for the situation and there were no harsh or strong words told to him. Is that the message that he is going to bring to Belgrade?

CARL BILDt: What, that I intervened in internal affairs?

SAME LADY: That you made an apology and that you excused yourself for intervening, in getting involved in Serbian internal affairs; that is what he told me in an interview.

CARL BILDt: That seems strange. What I said to him because he said something, I think, about internal affairs was: "That is not the way it is in Europe nowadays. There are no such things as internal affairs when it comes to human rights, respect for the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression and there is a very clear link between how a country manages its so-called "internal affairs" and its possibilities when it comes to external relations!" And whatever minister Milutinovic says to the "Voice of America", I think he has understood the message.

It remains to be seen what is the reaction of the regime as a whole in Belgrade and what happens to B92 is important as a sign of that but let us also be clear that B92 is not the whole story. The story is Serbia today is far greater than just the story of B92 or that B92 is a litmus test of what will happen one way or the other.

JIM FISH (BBC WORLD TELEVISION): Mr. Bildt, for withholding aid to work as an instrument of persuasion; how will the mechanism actually work? For the sake of argument, if Russia refuses to go along with the rest of the countries on the Steering Board withholding aid to the Bosnian Serbs, if they happen to boycott one of the central institutions, how do you overcome that kind of stalemate?

CARL BILDt: We have a situation where we have some major donors, the major donors being most of the Europeans, the European Commission, then the World Bank and then some other bilateral donors that are significant. We work together in what we call the "Economic Task Force" where we try to sit down and discuss the policies and the priorities, including these issues.

Of course, we do not have the right to command money, either to say send money or stop sending money when it comes to each and every individual donor but I think that you can say that all of the major donors are part of the Economic Task Force and all of the major donors are likely to follow the recommendations that we make on these particular issues.

We are keen to avoid a stop-go situation and too much of micro-conditionality and that is a delicate balancing act; if we start to rebuild a major power plant or a major railroad line; then we contract a lot of things, we start a large operation. When do we stop that? Where do we roll it back? Those are the kind of issues that we are discussing constantly in the Economic Task Force.

So far, as you know, only 2 per cent of the money has been going to the Republika Srpska. I said at the Conference today that that was not our intention, that is not the way we want it, that there should be more money going to these areas for a number of reasons, one of the reasons being that most of the refugees in western Europe are probably coming from these areas and in order to facilitate their return we need to help with the economic and social rehabilitation of those particular areas. The low percentage here is a product also of the policy of self-isolation taken by the Republika Srpska leadership at the beginning of this year.

How we have started preparations for projects and some of them are in the pipeline but they know full well that that is conditional on movement on their side towards fulfilment of all of the Dayton objectives and the time factor is of course both on their side and on the Federation side. For example, on the question of human rights, we can't say that we are satisfied with the situation anywhere in Bosnia but that is not a reason to stop every reconstruction effort but we must be satisfied that there is progress and that it is moving in the right direction.

QUESTION (BBC WORLD SERVICE) : Could you specify in what way the role of the High Representative has been strengthened if it has been strengthened because I understand that some of the delegations from Bosnia and from the region had problem with that ?

CARL BILDT : The only problem that they had was the problem that they had in Paris which was really the question of the Economic Task Force. The Economic Task Force is a critical component of the coordination of our efforts and I remember in Paris our original draft was that the Economic Task Force decided or discusses the priorities and the principles concerning reconstruction. Then the Bosnian Serbs, rightly so, said : "Well, we are the government !" - they were not eventually they were going to be the Council of Ministers. So now the Economic Task Force does the international reconstruction assistance in terms of the policies and priorities.

How is the role reinforced ? It is reinforced in that it is in much stronger language and a much stronger commitment by each and everyone involved towards the central coordination role of the office of the High Representative, sharing the principals' meetings which we have several times a week, which include all of the key civilian and military commanders or chairmen or whatever they are on the ground; the reinforced role of the Economic Task Force, the continue role of the Human Rights Task Force at the Human Rights Coordination Centre so on a number of points you will see stronger language on the coordinating role respecting the independence of the different lead agencies in the different lead agencies in the different areas.

QUESTION : The document talks about the parties. Do you believe that all three parties made their commitment equally or can you tell us how much each of the three sides made their commitments of these accord items ?

FOREIGN SECRETARY : I am not sure that one can provide a statistical measurement and the reality is that some areas meet more than the others do. I think there has been good progress from all three but it is patchy and what often happens is commitments are given and then are not implemented and then you have to put more pressure on them and then gradually progress is made but it is very difficult to give statistical version.

CARL BILDT : I would make another point which I think is fundamental. You say that in the document it talks about the parties. As a matter of fact you have not read the whole document because one significant step in this document if you compare it to last year is that there we talked about "the parties" and it was still parties to a conflict that had just ended. In this document, you will find that where it was "the parties" a year ago, it is now "the authorities" of Bosnia and Herzegovina except in certain sections, primarily arms control, where from the legal point of view it is still "the parties" but the transition from the old language "the parties" to the new language "the authorities" of Bosnia and Herzegovina, those being common institutions, the Federation and the Republika Srpska is of course very significant. It is a small change of words that signifies an emerging significant change of realities.

QUESTION (PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER): I am not quite understanding the role of the international police force in regard to the indicted war criminals. Are they to arrest them or not ?

CARL BILDT : No, that is not within their mandate and they are essentially, of course, police monitors. They are given a reinforced role here in a number of other areas : when it comes to transforming the local police forces which I think is going to be one of the key tasks of the consolidation period, making independent investigations of abuses done by the local police forces and also having a stronger possibility of going into the legal system, of going into the prisons, of going into the police stations to see what is really going on but the IPTF is not a law-enforcement force as such.

QUESTION :Mr. Bildt, following on from your earlier remark that one of the key elements in the return of refugees in terms of confidence is the presence of the IFOR force, the total numbers are going to be ; halved initially, and then progressively reduced further. Doesn't the logic of that suggest that there will be progressively less confidence of refugees to return as time goes on if they haven't done so already after a year or so and there are still a couple of million not in their homes ?

CARL BILDT :No, I don't think so. I am satisfied with what now seems to be emerging out of the NATO planning process for what is going to be called, I understand, the "Stabilisation Force, SFOR" which is going to be something of the order of half. I think that is sufficient to undertake the task that we from the civilian side see as essential during the consolidation period and I would even hope that during the consolidation period there will be such a development that we can see a gradual reduction in the number of troops because confidence-building to facilitate the return of the refugees will essentially have to be made by the civilian and political authorities. The military force is important in that it is a deterrent force that blocks the military option and takes fear of war away from the equation of the political leaders and to do that you need a substantially smaller force than you needed at the beginning when it was a question of separating the armies, transferring territories and guarding the IEBL and all of that so I think the force is going to be robust and sufficient.