

Letter from Amb.Steiner, 24/02/97

Letter of Ambassador Steiner to President Izetbegovic and President Zubak

Alija Izetbegovic
Chair of the Presidency

Kresimir Zubak
Member of the Presidency
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dear Presidents,

Please find enclosed an advance copy of the UN IPTF Report in pursuance of the 12 February Decisions on Mostar. This Report has been submitted to the Principals of the Major Implementation Agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Contact Group today and will form the basis for our meeting with the Federation partners scheduled for Tuesday, 25 February, when decisions on the necessary conclusions shall be taken. Please keep this Report absolutely confidential until after tomorrow night's meeting.

With the full support of the Principals and the Contact Group, I request from you the following:

- I. As you will see from the Report, the UN IPTF Special Investigation Group has succeeded in establishing the facts related to the intended Bajram visit to the Kneza Mihajla Humskog/former Liska Street graveyard on 10 February in full. The Report contains irrefutable proof that plainclothes and uniformed West Mostar police officers opened fire at the backs of citizens who had at that moment already given up on visiting the graveyard and were retreating. One person was killed and at least 20 persons were wounded.

The investigation did not reveal any provocations justifying the use of force by police. Instead, the investigation has shown that the West Mostar Police had received advance notification of the planned visit to the cemetery, had acknowledged the visit and had assigned police officers to the route in advance. There was no connection between the graveyard visit and the festivities on the Rondo. Nevertheless, rather than performing their duty of protecting the public, the police not only participated in but instigated the violence.

It is vital now to demonstrate to the citizens of this country that crimes do not go unpunished. In particular, the following must be undertaken immediately:

1. Ivan Hrkac, Deputy Chief of the West Mostar Police, and Zeljko Planinic, West Mostar police officer, have been identified as firing into the retreating marchers on Kneza Mihajla Humskog/former Liska Street on 10 February. One plainclothes officer, Bozo Peric, was identified by witnesses and seen firing into the crowd. They must be dismissed from office and arrested by 26 February, and then prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
2. Police officers Zlatko Pavlovic and Josip Cvitanovic have been photographed with their weapons drawn during the shooting. They must be suspended from their duties by 26 February and their actions must be criminally investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
3. Contrary to his obligation to co-operate fully, the Chief of the West Mostar Police Marko Radic obstructed the UN IPTF investigation. He must be dismissed from office by 26 February and replaced by a professional police officer from outside the Mostar region.

Criminal investigations and judicial proceedings relating to all police officers involved in the 10 February

incident must proceed promptly and be pursued to the full extent of the law with complete international monitoring.

In addition, as I have announced in Point 11 of the Mostar Decisions, I will recommend to the EU Governments and to the Steering Board members to bar those who have been identified in the Reports as perpetrators of the violence, including Mr. Hrkac, Mr. Planinic and Mr. Peric, from travelling to Europe and overseas.

- II. The shooting of 10 February is inexcusable. But it cannot be seen in a political vacuum. The weeks preceding 10 February saw a sequence of incidents, including grenade attacks on both sides of the city and on the Franciscan Monastery located at the Boulevard, without the political leadership undertaking serious joint efforts to calm down the growing tensions. It is distressing that neither the Mostar Mayor and his Deputy nor the Canton Minister of Interior and his Deputy, notwithstanding their political differences, addressed the public jointly and undertook all efforts to keep extremists in check. Their political performance and their efforts to put an end to inflammatory statements issued by public figures and in the press will have to be monitored closely. I will not hesitate to request your intervention and action of the EU Governments regarding travel restrictions against any politician in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton who continues to pour oil into the flames.

Additional steps need to be taken to further normalise the situation in Mostar and other parts of the Federation. The Report states that as information of the violence of 10 February spread, random and sporadic attacks on citizens in locations around the city and on routes out and into Mostar (M 17) were reported. These attacks involved Bosniak victims, but many of them were also directed against Bosnian Croats. The Report states that the failure of the police, both in East and West Mostar, to provide protection to potential and actual victims of the series of cross-entity attacks both in the incidents prior and after the 10 February event illustrates the serious absence of professional police leadership throughout the area. Therefore, I request from both of you to address this issue and to replace the police leadership on both sides of the Neretva with professional police officers from outside Mostar.

Violence spread beyond Mostar. On 20 February, unknown criminals attacked the Church and Monastery of St. Anthony in Sarajevo with hand grenades. This attack – in particular as it was directed against the Central Bosnian Franciscans who have long stood for tolerance and multiethnicity – is an assault on these values in Sarajevo, in the Federation and in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

The Principals have requested the UN IPTF and the Human Rights Coordination Centre of the OHR to submit an additional report detailing the incidents preceding and following the violence of 10 February for consideration by the Federation partners. The Federation partners must commit themselves to draw all necessary conclusions, including personal consequences for all officials and police officers who have failed to perform their duties.

- III. Mostar must be addressed now. But beyond recent events in Mostar, the Federation as a whole is facing a severe crisis. More radical efforts must be undertaken to achieve a turning point in the relations between the peoples of the Federation and their leaders. In particular, you should now commit yourselves personally to speedy implementation of the Sarajevo Protocol, the adoption of a first Law on Municipal Reforms, and further progress in building the Mostar institutions. The Federation must take a new approach to the media as well. The return of refugees and displaced persons must also be addressed. It is unacceptable that three years after the conclusion in Washington and Vienna Agreements, return of minority areas within the Federation has not yet really started.

I have enclosed a detailed list of steps to be undertaken following the UN IPTF Report, and of urgent Federation issues on which I will request your agreement tomorrow.

Yours sincerely;

Ambassador Michael Steiner
Principal Deputy High Representative

Office of the High Representative