Close Collective Centres and Ensure the Sustainability of Return

The unfinished business of moving displaced people out of collective centres and into homes of their own can be completed by implementing the Revised Annex VII Strategy adopted by the authorities in BiH last year, the High Representative noted today during a visit by representatives of Steering Board embassies to returnees and internally displaced citizens in both entities.

Today's visit to the communities of Gornja Bocina, Johovac and Tesanj in Central Bosnia was organised jointly by the UNHCR and the OHR. The High Representative Valentin Inzko, his Principal Deputy Roderick Moore and the Ambassadors of Canada, France and the UK, along with representatives of other Steering Board embassies, took part.

UNHCR BiH Representative Naveed Hussain said the initiative was an opportunity to show the PIC Steering Board "that the end of displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is achievable with a concentrated effort by authorities at all levels within the country, and with continued international community engagement."

In Bocinja and Johovac ambassadors met with Croat and Serb returnee families and discussed the socio-economic challenges they face, including damaged infrastructure, lack of

employment opportunities, and inadequate access to public services.

“Returnees and those who are still waiting for a permanent home in Bosnia and Herzegovina are a microcosm of the BiH population as a whole,” High Representative Inzko said. “They would have a better chance of resolving serious economic challenges if support services were better funded and better organised and if political focus was concentrated on the issues that citizens care about.”

After Bocinja and Johovac, the ambassadors visited Bosniak families living in a collective centre in Tesanj, who face acute psycho-social, medical and economic needs.

Sixteen years after the war almost 8,600 people still live in 159 collective centres across BiH, many of which lack basic facilities such as running water, heating and electricity.