

# **Bas-Backer: Reconciliation Indispensable for Post-War Recovery**

Justice, Truth, Peace and Forgiveness are four elements in a reconciliation process that is indispensable for post-war recovery, the Senior Deputy High Representative, Peter Bas-Backer, said in Belgrade on Friday.

“There can be no reconciliation without justice, and the primacy of justice cannot be avoided or replaced by anything else,” Ambassador Bas-Backer told participants at an international conference on inter-ethnic reconciliation and religious tolerance in the Balkans, organised by the European Center for Peace and Development.

In this respect, he warned that: “The path-breaking success of the ICTY has been compromised by the failure thus far of responsible governments and the international community to apprehend six high-level fugitives, above all Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. The fact that Karadzic and Mladic remain at large continues to impede post-war reconciliation as much as it affronts any sense that justice has been or is being done.”

Ambassador Bas-Backer said it was “essential that domestic courts in former Yugoslavia not only continue and complete the mission of the Hague Tribunal, but also that they bring the process back home”.

Ambassador Bas-Backer welcomed various initiatives aimed at establishing objective facts about the conflict of the early 1990s. Without this, he said “there is a serious risk that accumulated grievances, bitterness and guilt will be transformed into personal and historical myths that will make any sort of neighborly coexistence in this part of the world impossible.”

He stressed the importance of dialogue because “it can stop former enemies from continuing to dehumanise each other and, eventually, help them to live and work together again.”

Peace, Ambassador Bas-Backer pointed out, is the necessary backdrop for any effort to pursue Justice and Truth, which in due course may lead to Forgiveness.

“The process of reconciliation has to be led by local people,” he said. “Future efforts to build confidence and tolerance will depend largely on the engagement and commitment of domestic protagonists. International assistance and support will still be welcome, but under local ownership.”

“Reconciliation and renewed trust among national communities requires conscious commitment and hard work,” Ambassador Bas-Backer concluded. “The passage of time can help, but it can also freeze enmities as well as traumas. A buoyant economy can help as well, but it can also stimulate intense conflict over the division of the spoils. In short, there is no indirect or automatic route to national reconciliation. It must be actively sought and struggled for if this or any other region is to enjoy lasting peace and stability.”

The full text of Ambassador Bas-Backer’s speech can be accessed at [www.ohr.int](http://www.ohr.int)