

OHR's Statement at the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference in Mostar

Working Group Recommends Fixing BiH Judicial Salaries at Appropriate Level

The High Representative has received a Report compiled by the Working Group established at the beginning of this year to examine the level of judicial salaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina . Along with its Report, the Working Group has presented the High Representative with draft State, Entity and District laws that would render judicial salary levels appropriate to the resources and requirements of BiH.

The Report confirms that since the initial dramatic increase in judicial salaries, following the introduction of new legislation in 2000, salaries of judges and prosecutors have increased by between 40 and 44 percent. This has significantly expanded the income differential between judges and other citizens: judges now earn nearly ten times the average wage, compared to four and a half times the average wage four years ago. The lowest paid judge earns nearly six times the BiH average, the highest paid judge nearly 14 times.

The starting salary of a BiH judge is higher than that of a new judge in France or Slovenia . In no other country examined by the Working Group were judges of the highest courts paid more, comparative to the national salary average, than in BiH.

Adequate compensation for the judiciary is a major component in the effort to place the courts beyond the influence of graft and corruption; therefore the Working Group has not recommended radical salary reductions. It proposes harmonizing judicial salaries throughout the country with, for the most part, small decreases across the board, standardizing working

hours and leave entitlements and limiting supplementary and retirement awards. In addition, it proposes curbing future annual increases envisaged in the existing legislation.

At the end of last year, the High Representative emphasized that while judicial salaries must be competitive in order to shield judges and prosecutors from potential bribery, systematic increases in salaries are unsustainable. Salaries and benefits account for 84 percent of the total budget for the judicial system, leaving just 16 percent for essential expenses such as heating, electricity and telephones.

The High Representative will now review the report.