

Donors Raise 15.7 Million Euros For War Crimes Chamber Of BiH Court

At a Conference in The Hague today, the International Community pledged 15.7 million Euros towards the setting up of a specialized War Crimes Chamber in the Court of Bosnia.

"This will provide Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with the institution necessary to try individuals accused of committing war crimes in BiH during the 1992-1995 war. However, this institution will only succeed if it is properly financed, which is why this conference today is so important to ensure that those responsible for war crimes are brought to justice. The OHR will only support a process that has the necessary financing." Ambassador Bernard Fassier said today at the donors conference, hosted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Ambassador Fassier leads the international, multi-agency effort to support the development of the rule of law in BiH.

The OHR and the ICTY welcomed the generosity of the donors and confirmed that the amount pledged meets the requirements for the first two years.

In November 2002 the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, and the former President of the ICTY, Judge Claude Jorda, began discussions on developing BiH's capacity to try war crimes in its own courts. They agreed then that successfully prosecuting war crimes in BiH itself is an essential component in showing that justice is being served, promoting reconciliation among BiH's communities and in bringing closure to the relatives of the approximately 250,000 victims of the war.

"In August of this year, the United National Security Council, in resolution 1503, gave a ringing endorsement to the establishment of a War Crimes Chamber within the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an essential prerequisite for our [ICTY] completion strategy" said the President of the ICTY, Theodor Meron. "Today in this regard we have taken a big step forward."

Providing it receives sufficient financing, the specialized War Crimes Chamber is expected to become operational towards the end of next year and will over time take on a number of cases from the ICTY.

A detailed management plan and institutional budget, projecting the specialized Chamber's start-up costs during the first two years at 17.2 million Euros was presented to donors today. An additional 20.7 million Euros will be required for years three to five. This plan, refined in February of this year, is the result of discussions between BiH's own Judicial and Governmental institutions, the OHR, the ICTY and other international organisations present in BiH. BiH was represented by its Ambassador to the Netherlands, H.E. Zeljko Jerkic.

The proposals outlined in The Hague today include a specialized War Crimes Chamber within the Court of BiH, a War Crimes Department within the Prosecutors Office of BiH, and the renovation of facilities with adequate safety and security provisions, and detention facilities. A witness protection programme and an increased investigative capacity will have to be assured.

BiH's modernised criminal code, enacted at the start of the year, gives the Court of BiH jurisdiction in all serious crime cases, including war crimes. The specialized War Crimes Chamber will be strengthened by a temporary component of International Judges and Prosecutors for a transitional period of up to five years. There will be close cooperation with the ICTY during this initial period and thereafter the specialized Chamber will continue to prosecute war crimes in BiH.

Today's conference was organised by the OHR and was supported by the ICTY. Members of the Peace Implementation Council's Steering Board, the EU member states, the EU accession states, as well as other European Countries also attended the Conference.

A list of donors and pledges is available from the OHR and ICTY Press Offices.