Opening Remarks of Brcko Supervisor at the regular OHR Brcko press conference, on 21 August 2002

As you know, tensions have increased in Arizona Market as the Brcko District Government has moved to implement the redevelopment contract by closing down unauthorized businesses. At least the situation has become clearer: some landowners, and perhaps criminal elements, organized an illegal blockage of the Orazje-Tuzla Road last week, they have intimidated legitimate retail businessmen, and they have prevented Government officials from executing their duties peacefully. The police and government officials have tried to defuse the situation. But if these illegal tactics continue, I trust the police will undertake the necessary arrests and investigations to enforce the law. I understand that the illegal parking lots were closed this morning.

This conflict is not mainly about property rights. It has nothing to do with one national group or another. We are watching the efforts of organized crime to continue to control Arizona Market, without respecting the rule of law, as they have done for years. While some of the landowners told me they welcome the reconstruction and modernization of the market, the actions of others show clearly that they do not. Whether they like it or not, the contract with Italproject and the Regulatory Plan for Arizona Market were approved in an open, democratic procedure, and will be implemented in accordance with the law. Those working at the market, including shopkeepers on private land, must conclude contracts with Italproject if they wish to continue.

Every government has the right to expropriate property in the

public interest. Brcko District, like other democratic governments, will compensate legitimate owners according to the law. In the case of Arizona Market, expropriation is clearly necessary, as the Brcko Assembly decided in July. This is even more obvious, now that the opponents of the reconstruction of Arizona Market have resorted to blocking the road and denying access to government inspectors.

As everyone knows, the lack of infrastructure in Arizona Market is a threat to public health and safety. For years the landowners did little or nothing to improve it. They will not be allowed to block either the existing infrastructure, or prevent Italproject from building completely new infrastructure. Expropriation is clearly necessary to ensure that they do not.

I was disappointed to see that some political parties have foolishly tried to portray Brcko's efforts to improve the market as an attack on Croat national interests.

This argument is ridiculous. Anyone can participate in the legitimate business of the new Arizona Market. The Italproject contract even gives priority to those vendors already working in Arizona Market. What we are excluding is control by organized crime, regardless of ethnic groups. I cannot imagine why a political party would want to be associated with organized crime.

People in Bosnia and Herzegovina are tired of crime and corruption – every public opinion poll on the subject shows that. They want economic development under the rule of law. That is what we are determined to provide in Arizona Market.

Arizona Market is one of the biggest markets in the region. It has the potential to be even bigger. We must rebuild it now to take advantage of this real economic opportunity.