Sarajevo Returns Conference February 1998

In December 1997 at the Bonn PIC the following statement was made as part of the final text:

"Ensuring a multi-ethnic Sarajevo is central to the implementation of the DPA. The Council expresses disappointment at the failure of the authorities in SJO to encourage and facilitate the safe return of former inhabitants. The Council takes note of recent commitments made by the Sarajevo authorities to encourage and facilitate the safe return of former inhabitants. These commitments are long overdue and must translated into action immediately. So long as Sarajevo remains largely mono-ethnic, its position as the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain impaired. The Council endorses the efforts of the HR and UNHCR to develop a Sarajevo return strategy. It calls on the competent authorities to agree on that strategy prior to the conference on return to Sarajevo proposed by the High Representative which should be held in early 1998.

The date for the Sarajevo return conference has been set as Tuesday 3 February 1998. It will take place in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo.

The Conference will be chaired by High Representative Carlos Westendorp, US Presidential Envoy Robert Gelbard, and Herman de Lange, Director at the European Commission and supported by UNHCR the lead return agency in BiH.

Participants will include the principals of the main Dayton implementing agencies, Presidents and Ministers from both the Republika Srpska and the Federation, the Sarajevo City and Cantonal authorities, representatives of the EU and USAID, the Deputy High Representatives and representatives of the US, UK

and German Governments.

The key objective of the Conference will be to establish Sarajevo, the capital city, as a model of multi-ethnicity, tolerance and coexistence, in accordance with the goals set in the Dayton Peace Agreement and in subsequent decisions.

The Conference will set minimum return requirements to Sarajevo for 1998, as well as full Cantonal commitment to ensuring this. The Sarajevo municipalities will be called on to commit to simplifying the registration procedures for returnees, and to ensure their full reintegration into the community

The Conference will urge the Sarajevo Housing Committee to establish rapidly mechanisms for allocating socially-owned apartments, in accordance with Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement. During the Conference, the International Community will examine ways to intensify fund-raising for housing re-construction. However members of the International Community have stated that they will consider suspending essential aid in the event of failure to fulfill these objectives

It is also expected that the conference will agree a strategy for addressing multiple occupancy, to be implemented by the Sarajevo Cantonal authorities, in cooperation with the Sarajevo Housing Committee.

Conference delegates will also attempt to agree a programme, in conjunction with the Sarajevo education authorities, for a curriculum which fulfils the educational needs of the different ethnic and religious groups of the capital city, underpinned by non-discriminatory recruitment and training of teachers

Employment and public security issues will also be addressed and concrete proposals for matching activity in both areas to return objectives will be agreed.

The Conference will establish specific mechanisms for implementation of all of the above measures. Specifically, it is expected that a Sarajevo Return Commission comprising State, Entity and International officials will be appointed, to oversee implementation and to work in conjunction with UNHCR, the OHR and the Canton.