

## **Remarks by PDHR Donald Hays at the opening of the Bosniak Secondary School Annex in Zepce**

Minister Cosovic and Deputy Minister Sunjic,

Ambassador Klein,

Ambassador Bosscher,

Mr. Hovey,

Mr Malicbegovic

Members of the Zepce Interim Board and representatives of the municipality,

Parents and pupils

Once in a while everyday events highlight much larger issues and bring them into vivid contrast. Today's opening of the secondary school annex in Zepce does just that for me. For the last nine years the young people of this town have experienced segregated schooling – separate but certainly not equal. They have studied, played, and socialised separately. Both Ambassador Klein and I remember only too well when this was the rule in some parts of the United States. I can tell you now that separation of students in a community for any reason is not conducive to quality education or to a community's development.

With the opening of this new building, Zepce teenagers will begin to do things together, like their counterparts in other areas of BiH and those in the rest of Europe. Their education will be a common education. This is but a first step, we need to ensure that their education prepares them to undertake their role as citizens of this country and of Europe. Education can and should respect individual groups' distinct heritage, but it must also reflect the common attributes of mankind, and it must sponsor unity not division.

For that reason I say that the return of Bosniak students to the Zepce secondary school while an important milestone, is but a first step in this journey. A journey that will require political will, tolerance and a vision of a different tomorrow for this country.

I will not diminish the accomplishments of this community and certainly two schools under one roof is a better arrangement than separate schools. But I will tell you frankly that this can only be a transitional step toward the goal of a common, quality educational system, where every child has an equal place in the classroom, regardless of their race, creed or ethnic background. The secondary school students of Zepce will now enter the school building through the same entrance, but they will still have to wait for the next phase before they can enjoy real equality.

As a result of initiatives being undertaken by the education authorities in both Entities, more and more young people in BiH are benefiting from a system which allows them to study general subjects together and national subjects separately. This ensures that legitimate cultural aspirations are accommodated and at the same time it allows students from different groups to enjoy all the personal, academic and social benefits of studying together. If all of the children are to get the education they deserve and require, I see no choice but to set your goal on an even higher level of integration. I should perhaps point out that in Zepce computer classes will be integrated. This is no surprise – the future is high tech and the future doesn't care about ethnicity.

Despite these comments, the accommodations you have made to educate your young people, and in the systematic progress in reuniting your municipal administration, Zepce now offers pointers to the rest of the country.

The municipality has shown what can be achieved when pragmatic politicians concentrate on delivering improved services to all of their constituents. There is still much to do – municipal utilities, and the postal, electricity and forestry services must be integrated — but the municipality has largely dismantled the exclusive and unviable structures inherited from the war years and set in their place more efficient structures that work for the benefit of all citizens. This is a positive model. Every effort from politicians to bring back harmony is a new framework for a better tomorrow. Just think about the impact of say a person such as Albert Einstein, who was forced to leave his country because of his religion – think of the impact he made on my country and the world. Maybe someone from your environment can have the same impact on society.

I believe this project represents a very good example of how the International Community can coordinate its efforts effectively in order to deliver practical benefits to BiH citizens in close cooperation with the domestic authorities.

Thank you.