

High Representative marks International Women's Day

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, today visited the "Zene za Zene" workshop in Sarajevo to mark International Women's day, which falls on 8 March. "Zene za Zene International" is a domestic NGO which provides skills training and micro-credits to help women set up their own businesses. So far "Zene za Zene" has supported, funded or provided training to thousands of Bosnian and Herzegovinian women.

During his visit to the "Zene za Zene" workshop, the High Representative spoke with concern about increasing reports of domestic violence in BiH, in the vast majority of cases against women and children. The High Representative said that this is intolerable and a problem that must be addressed. He said that the war had left many women single, who are struggling hard to make ends meet. BiH is also, unfortunately, still faced with the problems of trafficked women and forced prostitution. The OHR is working with a variety of NGO's and the Entity Government's gender equality agencies to ensure that discrimination on the basis of gender is tackled, and domestic violence is prevented.

The High Representative is encouraged that the BiH authorities are taking a proactive stance with regard to gender equality, which is enshrined in the BiH Constitution and is a requirement for BiH's accession to the Council of Europe. Last month, the Council of Ministers adopted a State law on Gender Equality, which has now entered parliamentary procedure. This legislation legally ensures the equality of men and women in all spheres of life, including education, employment, social protection, health care and participation in public life. It

is a major step forward and will be the first legislation of its kind ever applied in BiH.

The High Representative encourages women to take a leading role in the future of BiH and pledges the backing of OHR for their efforts. He once again reaffirms the commitment of OHR to gender equality and to a society built on the principles of non-discrimination. In this regard, the importance of civil society, and the role of NGO's, should be emphasised.

The High Representative highlights the fact that International Women's Day should not be just an annual occasion on which gender equality is promoted, but rather a reminder that the right to freedom from discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on the basis of gender, is a basic human right that must be part of the modern social fabric of BiH.