

Information campaign to raise awareness of key amendments to the property laws

The PLIP agencies (OHR, OSCE, UNHCR, UNMIBH and CRPC) have launched an information campaign to explain the amendments to the property laws introduced on 4 December 2001. These amendments clarify the existing legislation with the aim of speeding up implementation of the property laws and ensuring the provision of alternative accommodation for those who really need it.

The campaign provides detailed information on the amendments and how they affect claimants and current occupants. It is being co-ordinated with the relevant Ministries in both Entities and consists of TV and radio spots as well as a leaflet, posters and press advertisements.

A number of new deadlines now apply as a result of these amendments, specifically related to the right to alternative accommodation, the repossession of a vacated apartment, and, finally, claims for destroyed socially owned property.

Firstly, the right to alternative accommodation requires claimants to take all possible steps to try and repossess their pre-war home. Displaced persons will now lose the right to alternative accommodation unless they:

- * submit a claim for the return of their private property by February 28, 2002;
- * submit a request for enforcement of any decision they have received for the return of their property issued by the responsible housing body or by CPRC, by February 28 2002, or within 60 days of receiving it.

Furthermore, there is no right to alternative accommodation for those whose housing needs can be met through living with their family household, using their own income to rent, or as a result of housing assistance they have received. Specifically, those who received a land plot, a housing credit, building material, or any other form of housing construction/purchase assistance, more than 5 months ago, will have to decide by February 28, 2001 whether to keep it or not. If they decide to keep it then they will be considered as having had their housing needs met and therefore will not have the right to alternative accommodation. The same principle applies to those who have received such assistance more recently and the leaflet outlines the deadlines that apply to them.

With regard to repossession the deadline for picking up the keys to a socially owned apartment is now 30 days (and not 90 days) from receiving written notification that it is vacant.

And finally, in the case of a pre-war socially owned apartment which was destroyed, and for which no claim was filed, there is now a chance to do so. According to the amendments, a claim for the repossession of a destroyed or damaged socially owned apartment can be filed until 30 June 2002.

Further details on these deadlines and changes with respect to exchanges of property, and the provision of alternative accommodation can be found in the leaflet, which is available from OHR, OSCE, UNHCR, UNMIBH and CRPC offices, housing offices or your nearest legal aid centre.