

New Head of RRTF meets with RS Minister for Refugees and Displaced Persons

Yesterday, Peter Bas-Backer the Deputy High Representative and Head of the Return and Reconstruction Task Force (RRTF), met with Mico Micic, the Republika Srpska Minister for Refugees and Displaced Persons (MRDP), in the RS Government Buildings in Banja Luka. Discussions were held in a constructive atmosphere, in a meeting called to develop a working partnership between the new head of RRTF and the Minister of Refugees and Displaced persons, and focussed on the role of the RS authorities in improving returns results.

The Head of the RRTF expressed his dissatisfaction with the rate of implementation of the property laws imposed by the High Representative, where although progress had been noted, more effort has to be made. Also highlighted was the slow and insufficient level of RS Government assistance to Serbs wishing to return to their own homes in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Earlier this year, the RS Government made a commitment to give 500 packages of reconstruction material to returnees, yet so far only 52 packages have been dispersed among returnees in Glamoc and Drvar, and 31 are planned for Maglaj and Grahovo. Considering that this year thousands of BiH Serbs have chosen to return, in particular to Cantons 1, 6 and 10, this assistance is inadequate and slow. The Ministry must become more effective in providing this type of assistance in the future.

The Head of RRTF is aware that the RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons has received less than 50% of the budget planned at the beginning of the year. Instead public funds

continue to go towards building new housing units elsewhere, which falls unacceptably short of the commitment to accelerate and support the right to return, guaranteed under the Dayton Peace Agreement. The OHR expects the elected representatives of the RS to take responsibility for the timely and efficient use of public funds to assist all their people, not just those in areas where it is politically expedient. This is the first time the government has provided tangible support to return, but it must become more than just a token effort.

The Head of RRTF and the Minister for Refugees and Displaced Persons agreed that closer liaison between the International Community and the MRDP, with the aim of enabling sustainable return is necessary.

Also discussed was the conference the MRDP will host on 23rd of October in Teslic with the Federation authorities on the implementation of the property laws. At this conference both Ministries will have the opportunity to significantly assist citizens in reclaiming their property through the acceptance of amendments to the property laws, the installation of an information exchange system, and harmonisation of the instructions for the privatisation of apartments. The OHR expects concrete results from this conference as a sign that the Entity authorities are acting in the best interests of their citizens and are supporting the returns process.