

High Representative welcomes opening of Regional DP Centre in Srebrenica

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, welcomes the opening of the Federation Ministry for DPs and Refugees' Regional Centre for Return in Srebrenica. The purpose of the centre is to support implementation of the property laws, co-ordinating efforts between Federation authorities and the International Community. It will serve people who return to Srebrenica, as well as people who return from the area to other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among other things, the centre, which will be run by multiethnic staff, will serve as a focal point for the collection of property claims, requests for enforcement of decisions, and other property-related documentation. It will also provide legal advice and information for returnees. Further, the centre will engage in raising donor support and supporting job creation in the area. The Office of the High Representative expects that the opening of this centre will significantly enhance the implementation of property laws.

The OHR is encouraged that the Federation Minister for Social Welfare and Refugees and DPs, Sefer Halilovic, has pledged assistance for the construction of 300 houses in the Srebrenica area. The OHR also welcomes the fact that the authorities of the Federation and the RS are now using funds to support the return priorities identified by RRTF, although it should be noted that there is a need for further support for returns to the Federation.

The OHR calls upon the Republika Srpska Ministry for Refugees and DPs to open similar offices in the Federation, which will work on two-way return. One office already exists in Sarajevo. But there is a need to cover other areas, to which people have returned in significant numbers.

The International Community has invested considerable effort in improving the situation in Srebrenica, and there is progress. Successful co-operation has been established between the municipalities of Srebrenica and of Federation Ilidza, Hadzici, Ilijas, Vogosca, Bugojno and Bosanska Krupa with the aim of speeding up implementation of property legislation and supporting two-way return. The OHR would also like to stress that many DPs from Srebrenica who currently live in Tuzla and Sarajevo have received positive decisions on their requests for the return of apartments to which they have occupancy rights, but have not yet requested enforcement of these decisions. The OHR is encouraging them to do so because they risk losing their occupancy rights if they fail, without good cause, to initiate enforcement proceedings within 90 days of the expiration of the deadline for the current user to vacate.