Remarks to Secondary School Teachers by Henry L. Clarke, Supervisor of Brcko

It is an honor to meet with you today. In every country, teachers deserve great respect, for the responsibility they, and you, accept for educating the next generation. You can give the children of Brcko District the ability to reach a much higher level of intellectual, professional, and even financial achievement, higher than any previous generation. Similarly, it will be your daily influence, inside and outside the classrooms, that will increase the capacity of the District's children for more tolerant and successful human relationships as they grow up. The way you conduct your classes, and your personal relationship with each child, will give our children their best chance for a brighter future.

Today I want to say more about your role, and how important it will be in the transition to a new Brcko District. I look forward to your questions at the end.

Brcko's institutions are undergoing deep, structural reform. The reforms include the Government itself, the legal system, the individual laws, the budget and other financial control systems, multiethnic hiring, the new salaries, and bans on conflicts of interest. Together, the Brcko District Government and OHR are transforming the whole political structure of the District. Reform in the schools – the new law, the harmonized curriculum, integration and reorganized classes – is closely related to the other reforms and will affect the whole society.

Some people talk about Brcko as a laboratory. I do NOT

consider Brcko a laboratory. We are NOT testing anything, or anybody's theory. We are making the minimum changes that are essential to reconstruct Brcko after a destructive war, and to give our children the chance for a better life.

We cannot bring about these minimum reforms by going backwards, or even looking backwards. We must work hard to repair the damage from the war, and to improve the public school system that we have. We have no time to waste. Other countries that were once part of Eastern Europe are moving ahead, and some, such as Hungary, Czech Republic, the Baltic States, Slovenia, are now years ahead of Brcko.

Leadership is always important, but it is critically important during a time of rapid change. Right now your leadership is critically important in every school, and in every classroom. I know what kind of school I would like to work in, and I think it is the same for you. Where the entire staff is intellectually stimulated, professionally challenged, looking forward to teaching more interesting material more effectively. Where both the teachers and the pupils are pleased with their progress, and somehow know that next year will be even better than this year. Where pupils look to you for the support they need when they are doing the right thing, and for your guidance when they do not understand, or are not sure what to do. Where everyone knows they can count on you to be scrupulously fair to everyone, and to be firm in demanding high standards. Where those who disrupt the schools, or fail to meet your high standards, will face real consequences.

Last year we had a disaster: there was violence in the schools, and then in the streets. Ethnic hostility was deliberately politicized. The schools were closed. Pupils and teachers who instigated these problems were not always

disciplined. But then the schools recovered and went forward to complete the year.

Members of the press have asked me about the risk of disturbances again this year. I think it is only fair that I discuss this question openly with you. It is not a pleasant subject. I hope there will be no disturbances, either inside the schools or outside. But given the potential threat from the extreme nationalists, you need to know how we will respond, and what is expected from you.

This year will be different from last year. I made that promise to the school directors, and I make the same promise to you: this year will be different. How can I say that? Let me be specific.

1. We have new laws, and a new system for prosecution.

2. The police are better prepared for violence in the streets.

3. You and the school directors have been hired with the understanding that you will support multicultural education.

4. You will have more time and training to reflect on how to handle difficult disciplinary situations.

5. We have a code of conduct for pupils, and another code for teachers and administrators, that specifically address interpersonal relations. I URGE you to be certain that every child knows the code for pupils, and has an opportunity to discuss the code obligations with you. These codes should be like contracts, between you

and the pupils, and between you and the school administration.

6. I do NOT plan to close all the schools, even if there are some serious disturbances. I will only close a school, or recommend closing, if control is lost in THAT school.

7. Where there are serious disturbances, whether or not the school is closed, there will be an investigation of what went wrong, and who did, nor did not, take responsibility for restoring discipline.

8. Teachers or administrators who instigate or contribute to disturbances will lose their jobs. Those who do not assume responsibility for enforcing the codes of conduct will have their performance examined.

Perhaps you may think I am speaking too bluntly. I do respect the fact that you know teaching better than I do. Yet we are about to make a truly historic transition in the Brcko schools. So I would rather be too blunt, than leave you in any doubt about what I expect from all of you, including the school administrators, the police, and everyone else.

This is not an experiment. We are going to make this transition only once. For the sake of the children, all of us need to give this transition our best effort right from the start.

As I told the school directors, I think we will have had so much public discussion about the changes in the educational system, that by the beginning of September, the risk of

disturbances will be small. Unfortunately, the Law on Education has been politicized. No matter how peaceful the majority of the people in Brcko may be, a few troublemakers will probably try to upset the rest. Therefore it is important that each of you knows not only your own role, if there are problems, but also the roles of those who can help.

The Brcko Police have been taking training courses on the new criminal laws. They have been specifically instructed in the difference between crimes and misdemeanors. They know the differences between dealing with underage children and adults. They have addressed those issues specifically with respect to public order and safety.

They are, of course, able to come into your school if you need their help. Unless you have a problem, or have a specific reason to expect a problem, they will most likely not be inside your school, unless you invite them to come in. The school directors and teachers are primarily responsible for what happens inside the school and on the school grounds.

I have asked the police to ensure that every pupil who wants to come to school will have access to the school without harassment or physical threats. On the first day of school, and any other day when there might be reason to expect difficulty, the police will establish a perimeter around the approaches to each school. The perimeter will be perhaps 100 meters from the grounds of the school, depending upon the physical situation of each school. Within the perimeter the police will ensure that there is no interference with the pupils or teachers who are coming to school. Some police will be visible, and they will also have additional support that will be out of sight.

More important, the police have assigned specific policemen to

be in touch with each school. I have asked the school directors to discuss what might happen with the police in advance, and to know how to reach them in an emergency.

Are you prepared for the situation inside the schools? Do you know the rules for offensive national symbols? Will you be alert to the kind of hazing or harassment, which is not only contrary to the code, but which might lead to more serious conflict? Can you stop those problems as they arise, before they are out of control? Of course you can – better than I could!

Some of you will be seriously challenged, no doubt. The endless task of maintaining discipline is probably not your favorite part of being a teacher.

Yet there is no education without discipline – and the discipline takes many forms.

Your job includes, of course, much more than discipline. The whole idea of a multicultural curriculum depends mainly on you. I was really extremely pleased when I learned the important contribution that many of you made in preparing the harmonized curriculum. That fact helped to convince me that this curriculum will work, that it can be modified if necessary, and that it will soon work better than the entity curricula it replaced.

Of course, only you can make that happen. The principles of the Law on Primary and Secondary Education, and the principles of the Implementation Plan, are very clear and very fair. They place the main burden on you. In my opinion, that is exactly where the responsibility should be: it is above all teachers who are responsible for teaching, and for everything that happens (or does not happen) in their classroom.

For example, you must allow the pupils to use their version of the local languages, yet you must speak to each child so that he can understand. The equal learning of the two alphabets will be largely in your hands. I won't try to mention all the aspects you need to handle.

At least as important as the curriculum will be your example, in making sure that each child is treated equally. Those of you who have read the Final Award of the Brcko Arbitral Tribunal know that it requires me, as the Supervisor, to ensure that every resident of the District shall be given equal access to adequate education without discrimination. That is a very demanding requirement. That is why the law is so clear and so strict.

Moreover, the principles are not just legal requirements. Taken together the principles are a strong moral statement that everyone in Brcko District can, and must, be treated equally in public schools. The example you set, in and outside the classroom, as you deal with each pupil in the presence of other young people, will teach this principle more clearly and more permanently than I can.

I imagine that most of you are teachers because you like young people and like teaching them. You know a great deal about how to bring out the best efforts from each pupil. You will undoubtedly know when patience, or encouragement, will be even more effective than discipline.

In recent years there have been a large number of programs for youth in Brcko that have been organized on a multiethnic basis. To my knowledge, not one of them has failed. They are all voluntary, you may say, and that is true. They succeed because they offer the young people something better. So they want to join. But they also succeed because children can

behave better in a multicultural situation than many adults. They were not born prejudiced. Unlike you and me, they are still learning faster.

My remarks so far apply to teachers throughout the school system. I would now like to add a few comments specifically directed to you, the secondary school teachers. We all expect that the process of integration will occur more slowly in the primary schools, and will occur mainly as the people living near each primary school move in or move out of the area.

The biggest change will be in the first year of secondary school. As you know, each pupil has already selected his or her preferred vocation, and those who are qualified will be assigned to the consolidated school which teaches that vocation. They will not be assigned by nationality, but will experience the full implementation of the new harmonized curriculum – studying together for universal subjects, dividing into national groups for the subjects of national interest (language, literature, some history and musical culture). The second, third and fourth grades of secondary school will retain the classes that were formed in previous years. But the schools will no longer be divided into separate schools for separate nationalities. Classes of Serbs will be studying at the same time of day as other classes of Bosniaks in the upper three grades.

So it is reasonable to expect more apprehension, and tension, among the secondary school pupils than in primary schools. I realize that these children are likely to remember more of the traumas of the war than the younger children, and perhaps would have stronger emotions on national issues. They have been attending segregated schools for most of their education.

Yet we can also expect that the secondary school pupils are

looking forward to their own futures. It will be clear to the majority that they will soon be living in a multicultural world. Perhaps they can be politicized, but I believe that they will see that causing trouble will only hurt their own future. Most will not find it difficult to tolerate their schoolmates from other nationalities, especially if they have reasonable and firm guidance from you.

The people in Brcko have already restored multicultural life here in town and in several of the villages of the District. The schools are almost the last segregated institutions. In the Government, the courts, the police, most workplaces, the shops downtown, or in Arizona Market – this is a multicultural society. YOU have the wonderful opportunity of making this society a better one, through your work with Brcko's most valuable resource – the young people.