

## **Statement by the PIC Steering Board on Eastern Slavonia**

The Steering Board welcomes the holding of the Croatian municipal and Upper House elections in Eastern Slavonia on 13 April 1997, and the guarantees of special representation for Serbs in both local and national, political and administrative structures. The Steering Board also welcomes the Letter of Intent from the Croatian Government and the agreements regarding municipal boundary changes and the Joint Council of Municipalities. These are important commitments and should be supported and implemented.

The Steering Board urges the Serb and other populations currently resident in Eastern Slavonia to apply for citizenship documents and to actively engage in the election process, as well as the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in the upcoming months.

The Steering Board calls on the Croatian Government and the local Serb leadership in Eastern Slavonia to accelerate implementation of agreed technical procedures and to solve the situation of the Serb displaced persons, and to continue to do their utmost to prevent an exodus from the area into neighbouring countries. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia lack the absorption capacity to receive additional refugees. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an influx of refugees would further destabilise the delicate socio-economic situation and hinder the process of finding solutions for the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes of origin.

The successful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia and its population into the administrative and legal structures of the Republic of Croatia, and the mutual return of Croatian and Serb displaced persons to their homes of origin, would be an important precedent for the broader region. The Steering Board urges governments to carefully monitor and support this process.