

Joint Statement by the High Representative and the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska in Banja Luka

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT

**by Carl Bildt, High Representative
& Rajko Kasagic, Prime Minister of
Republika Srpska**

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This week has seen a series of international events in Banja Luka, which have reinforced the city's importance in the Republika Srpska. They have included the opening of the Banja Luka office of the High Representative, Carl Bildt; visits by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Swiss Foreign Minister Cotti; the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ogata; and the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Former Yugoslavia Mrs. Rehn; Baroness Chalker UK Overseas Development Minister; and US Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum. Later today the Office of the High Representative will chair the first session of the Joint Civilian Commission for this region, which will bring together representatives from the Republika Srpska and the Federation to discuss issues of special importance to the people of this region, including freedom of movement, visits between the two entities, elections and reconstruction.

International representatives in these Banja Luka events have stressed their interest in seeing the people of Republika Srpska resume their proper role of active contacts in the affairs of Europe and the world, on the basis of full implementation of all provisions of the Dayton Peace

Agreement. The international community has made clear its interest in assisting economic reconstruction within the Republika Srpska. Just this week Banja Luka has seen the European Union agreeing to provide assistance in agricultural support and the British and Japanese governments agreeing to provide assistance in rebuilding electric power links between Banja Luka and Tuzla.

International representatives in Banja Luka have highlighted the importance of reconciliation among all of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Meetings between religious leaders in Banja Luka reinforced the importance of fostering religious tolerance as a way of rebuilding confidence and trust. Holding elections in the time frame established by the Dayton Agreement is the only way to be certain that the ravages of war remain a thing of the past. Access to the media by all opposition parties, prompt establishment of local commissions and full respect for the rules and regulations of the Provisional Election Commission are essential to the holding of free elections.

This week's international presence in Banja Luka has fully revealed the benefits that can flow to the people of all of the Republika Srpska from contacts with Europe and the world, provided there is full implementation of all terms of the Dayton peace Agreement. All leaders of the Republika Srpska must fully support and implement these policies, aimed at economic progress, reconciliation and democracy. This is the only way for the people of the Republika Srpska to build a peaceful and prosperous future, together with the other peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.