Transcript of the Joint Press Conference by SFOR, UN, OHR and OSCE

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Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Could I have your attention please. Today's press conference will be dedicated to the murder that happened in Drvar on which we briefed you yesterday. We have here, starting from the right end of the table, the Deputy Commander of SFOR for operations, Lieutenant General Sir Hew Pike; the IPTF Commissioner Richard Monk; the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, Ms. Elisabeth Rehn; the High Representative, Carlos Westendorp; and the spokesman for the OSCE, Nicole Szulc.

Ambassador Westendorp.

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Hello. Today is a-and yesterday was a very sad day for Bosnia, and for all of us. You know that two innocent persons, a woman and a man were killed. They were murdered. Both of them were Serbs and citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This followed a constant harassment of Serb returnees and numerous arsons of houses. And, we, in view of all that, we have decided to take very strong measures to stop this kind of actions which are directly against the peace process. These actions will be explained by Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn in detail, but I just want to tell you that among them, there is the request to the authorities to dismiss the canton chief of police, the canton Minister of the Interior. And, myself have decided to demote-to dismiss the Deputy Mayor of Drvar.

But, there are other measures and other measures will follow. And, these would be explained by Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn, and I also would like that the representative of OSCE would explain to you that those persons who are dismissed because of the violation of the peace agreements are going-are never going to be able to present themselves to be elected by the people.

Hard-liners in this country will not stop return process, and we will not tolerate any obstructions or violence, and will hold the authorities of this country responsible at all levels. The killings have to stop. No more human bloodshed in this country. We will do everything necessary to realize this. And, I like that Mrs. Rehn explains to you the important measures that have been taken.

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: Thank you, Ambassador Westendorp. It's really very important to take notification of the fact that the international community is standing very firm and together in this matter. We can't afford and we can't allow that innocent people are killed. There have been a lot of harassment, also very much just attached to the returns, the minority returns that are so important. But, in this very case, they have gone too far with the harassment.
Just the immediate steps we took yesterday, through the night, and today are very much attached to the fact that evidence must not be spoiled, that we must take care that all evidence is there. One of the most important evidences are, of course, the bodies of those who were killed. There was a demand from the Croat police that they should be taken for autopsy to Split, and that is absolutely not possible in our view.

So, I had to make the decision to take the bodies to Sarajevo. We had approval of the president of the court to surrender the bodies to us and accompanied by IPTF police and the local police representative. They arrived at about, yeah, quarter after midnight this morning to our office, to the UNMIBH office, where they were escorted to the military hospital in Rajlovac.

I have used this morning to secure that we will have the autopsy made by representatives of the Canton Ten. So, that all the formalities will be really kept. And with representative that Mayor Marceta sent from Banja Luka-he will arrive quite soon, and then we have the international supervision performed by physicians of human rights.

I count on that autopsy will start today at 3:00, and it's very important that it's made in this way, so that nobody can claim that there has been any kind of partiality with this very important step.

Of course, I had to inform the presidents about this. So, I called both President Ganic and Vice President Soljic yesterday evening. And, I was very pleased to get the support from both of them for the steps taken. So, in that sense, they have been very cooperative in this sense, both of them.

But, of course, a lot is still remaining with the cooperation. And, as Ambassador Westendorp already declared, we have to take those strong steps. And, yesterday I gave a press statement where I told that I'm asking for the suspension of these persons, but unfortunately that is really not enough.

After following the incidents, also through the night yesterday evening, we had again a house burning. This morning a house was burning. And, that means that there is really no compliance from the leadership of the police and the Minister of Interior. They are not able to secure the people who have been moving in. And, we must remember that that couple that was murdered had been moving a couple of weeks ago. They have been harassed all the time by their neighbors, and though they couldn't be secured by the police authorities.

So, therefore I have just sent a letter to the same presidents, members of the presidency, Ganic and Soljic, telling that those are the steps that must be taken. Furthermore, we gave them 48 hours to just appoint 15 Serb

police to Drvar because we must remember that due to all the agreements there should be an absolute majority of Serb police. Today there is none. So that this must be taken care of, Mayor Marceta could easily identify more than that amount of Serb police. So, I think that it's technically doable, to get them appointed.

This is important for the fact that if we will have any kind of reconciliation in this country, things like this can't happen. We have to be strong about this. And, we will be strong. I'm not really avoiding any kind of means to get through with this question. And, it's important for all of us. Thank you.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: We will now move to questions. First, I'd like to ask everybody to introduce themselves when asking the question. Also, specify who you're addressing the question to, and we will only take questions dealing with Drvar.

Yes, please.

(Vedran Persic – OBN Television) Q: This question goes for, I think UN Mission. So, you gave them 48 hours to find 15 Serb police officers. As I know, in Drvar there is no Federal police uniforms, so will those Serb police wear the uniforms with Herzeg-Bosna symbols?

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: If I should start to answer that question, then I will forward that to the Commissioner, to Richard Monk. First of all, we have a-you will have that letter. I think that that will be shared with you.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: We've got copies of the letter are available.

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: The copies of the letter are there. IPTF will provide the authorities with a list. So, they even don't have to bother themselves to find these people. The only thing is that we ask them to authorize them, because, of course, we

want to follow the legal way. It's quite crystal clear that they shall not have any kind of Herzeg-Bosna insignias on them. And, this is one other matter that shows now that now or never there is the time to have the inauguration of the joint police and really go clearly out from the fact, that also was stated in the Federation Forum yesterday, that until 14th of May all this must be cleared up, and we have the joint police in Cantons Eight and Ten. So, all this is very much attached to each other, but I-the technical question, please, Commissioner.

Richard Monk, IPTF: Very recently I spoke to Mr. Leutar, and Mr. Zilic, about the issues in Canton Ten, and I'm quite hopeful in the next 2 days or so that we will be able to resolve most of the outstanding, if not all the outstanding issues in Canton Eight, Canton Ten, and the Ministry. And, I would include the point that you have just raised, so I do not expect there to be any difficulty over that.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Follow-up.

(Vedran Persic – OBN) Q: I'd just like to follow-up. Question for the UN Mission and the OHR? Do you have a-have you planned to do this actions in some other cities, just to prevent events? I mean, I mean these murders, to prevent similar murders in some other cities, so do you have plans maybe to sack the police chiefs, the mayors, deputy mayors in some other cities, just to prevent that these things will never happen again?

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: If that is in any way just giving some kind of advice that we should be partial, that's not the fact. Already, before all this started to happen, I wrote to both President Ganic and to Vice President Soljic, and we had meetings around this that no matter in which part of Bosnia-Herzegovina there will be incidents like this-we did not know then that really so dramatic incident will happen-we will not look through our fingers. We will take all the necessary

steps, and that's made quite clear, and that is also our way of working.

Carlos Westendorp, HR: But, you will remember that this is not the first time. We had to do it also in Stolac, and of course, if these measures are necessary in other places, we'll not hesitate in taking them.

Richard Monk, IPTF: Could I also respond-can I also respond to that. We are more than ever, making a very clear message that we expect the local police to, with very firm resolve, secure their environment and carry out what we believe to be professional policing. There is no way that we can expect people to return unless they feel safe and secure. And, police officers do have a responsibility to ensure that the community trusts the action they take.

There are some areas, which I shall not mention, but probably are known to people in this room where particularly we are concerned about the lack of resolve, and we are therefore watching very closely the inactivity by some chiefs of police and other police officers. As soon as we have sufficient information which suggests that they are either incompetent or worse, we shall take steps to remove them.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Next question, in the back.

(Mirsad Fazlic, Vecernje Novine) Q: I'm curious what will happen if the local police or cantonal police don't recognize these 15 Serb police officers, in this period of 42 hours? I mean what kind of measures do you have on your disposal? What will happen next?

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: In my letter to the presidents, I have mentioned that if they will fail with this, I will ask the High Representative to appoint an interim police supervisor in Drvar. We will not give up this, and I think that we have to take also very many steps, in that sense that if those persons that we have mentioned now, will not be dismissed, all the

orders taken by police from them will also be illegal. So, that means we perhaps have even to go to de-certify police who are taking orders from those. We are ready to really take very strong measures.

Carlos Westendorp, HR: May I add just simply that the responsibility of compliance with these requirements lies on the authorities. And, as I said in my introductory statement, we are not going to hesitate in asking this responsibility to these authorities-whatever the level of these authorities. Then I would like just to pass the word to the representative of OSCE because these kind of measures are going to have repercussions in the next elections.

Nicole Szulc, OSCE: Thank you, Ambassador Westendorp. Ambassador Robert Barry has asked me to express as strong as possible support of the OSCE for the actions taken yesterday by the High Representative and the IPTF to address the tragic events in Drvar. As you know, the PEC Rules and regulations and Article 7.10d, already adopted this year, prohibit any person who has been removed from public office by the High Representative or the Election Appeals Sub-Commission, from standing for office in the 1998 general elections. Clearly, the actions taken-taken here, or described here, will have affect on people wanting to run as candidates in the 1998 general elections. Thanks, Ambassador.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Question right there.

(Ranko Mavrak – HINA) Q: Madame Rehn, you said that local police in Drvar is definitely unable to provide security for returnees and for the local people, so I'm interested if you have discussed at any stage, possibility for more robust SFOR engagement in the region?

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: Of course, SFOR has to answer this, and that's why General Pike is here, too. But, already yesterday, we had a very strong cooperation in this sense, so that, even

so late as 10:30 last evening, when I heard about that one house was again burning, I asked General Pike to increase still the presence of SFOR. They had already increased it, so the reports were quite clear during the night, through the night, they were patrolling and also helicopters were there. But, I think it's better that the general is answering that.

Lt. Gen. Sir Hew Pike, SFOR: I'd simply add that-that the SFOR remains four square behind all that you've heard already at this press conference. And, I have nothing further to add to that.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Follow-up.

(Ranko Mavrak – HINA) Q: Can I just follow-up? Did you deploy some additional troops in the region? How many soldiers do you have? What are their instructions right now?

Lt. Gen. Sir Hew Pike, SFOR: Well, I think you're probably familiar with the approximate force level in that area. Our force levels are flexible and we adjust them on an hourly, daily-if necessary, minute-to-minute basis, depending upon the local conditions. And, that's what we're doing there, as elsewhere throughout the country.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Question.

(Erich Rathfelder – Die Tageszeitung) Q: This is more a background question for Mr. Westendorp. A lot of people from Central Bosnia, a lot of Croatian people were settled into Drvar, also from Vares and other places. And now my question is, do you have any evidence that the Croatian authorities press those people not to return to Vares and other places to keep them there in Drvar in order to maintain a Croatian majority there? And, if yes, what will you do against this?

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Well, you know the government of Croatia has a responsibility for the Dayton implementation. They are signatories, and one of the guarantors of the peace

agreement. And, we are in constant contact with the authorities of Croatia in order to fulfill with their obligations.

I have no evidence of these orders you have mentioned, but the Croatian authorities can do a lot to prevent these moves, precisely, at this very moment, my Principal Deputy, General Jacques Klein, is in Zagreb.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Any other questions? In the front, Yamila first, then Aida.

(Yamila Milovic – Radio Mir) Q: Mr. Westendorp, you have just mentioned that you won't hesitate to take the strongest possible measures at the highest level, if needed. Does that mean that we are to read it, if the obstruction of the peace process continues, that the high ranking officials, such as, for example, Mr. Leutar or Mr. Soljic, are going to be strongly advised to resign.

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Don't mention any names, please, but I am ready to do everything as necessary.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Aida, in the front.

(Aida Cerkez – AP) Q: I have a very simple, technical question for the IPTF. How many Croat policemen are they in Drvar? So, we can-there's going to be 15 Serbs confronting how many? We can figure out whether this is going to work right away.

Richard Monk, IPTF: I can't give you that information at the moment, because it hasn't been given to me. I've asked that question this morning, and I haven't yet got a confirmed answer.

(Aida Cerkez – AP) Q: Okay, I'll will try to call you-

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Be in touch with our office. We'll provide that to you. Colin Soloway.

(Colin Soloway – Washington Post) Q: Madame Rehn, you answered the question previously as what you would do if the Serb police were not recognized, that you would-there was a possibility of putting in place an interim supervisor. What happens if the cantonal officials, or the cantonal MUP chief of police, and MUP chief refused to step down, as Mr. Raguc did in Stolac for some time? Will you-will you present an interim supervisor at that level as well? I mean, is that a possibility?

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: As I said already, if they are not stepping down, if they are not forced to step down, then we have to take this on the political level. And, I'm fully counting on the cooperation by High Rep in this question because I'm, of course, in charge of what is happening within UN and especially IPTF. And, the political pressure, that is something that Ambassador Westendorp is in charge of, and I don't doubt one single moment that we can't find the steps to take.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Any other?

Carlos Westendorp, HR: I fully endorse these words.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Okay.

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Thank you.

(Robert MacPherson – Agence France Press) Q: Last week we were talking about Drvar in rather glowing terms because the HVO was leaving civilian housing and making way for returnees. Yesterday, the Mayor of Drvar was heard on Bosnian Radio as saying that these kinds of incidents are going to happen again, if the HVO stays in Drvar ?(inaudible)? such. Do you agree with that? And do suspect that this incident was not the act of certain individuals acting like hooligans? That it might have been much more organized, and might have been organized by HVO unit?

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Who's your question addressed at?

(Robert MacPherson – Agence France Press) Q: Anyone and everyone.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Okay.

Lt. Gen. Sir Hew Pike: I'll respond to that-such, by simply saying to you that, so far as I, and I suspect anyone else, am aware, there is absolutely no evidence whatever to connect the HVO with this or any other of the recent incidents in Drvar.

Elisabeth Rehn, SRSG: But, I believe that it's very important that it will be absolutely decreased, the amount of HVO representatives there. I can agree with that, but speculations are not anything that we can just give our support to. We must have evidence.

Lt. Gen. Sir Hew Pike: You will also be aware that there are medium-term plans, which at the moment we are in the process, with the Office of the High Representative, negotiating and taking forward with the Federation authorities for a permanent relocation of certain of those units and sub-units that were previously in the Drvar area. That is ongoing.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: The Principals will take one more question, if there is one more? Right there, right here, gentleman didn't have a chance to ask a question.

(Senad Slatina – Slobodna Bosna) Q: Mr. Westendorp, I mean, I'm asking a general question. How do explain such a serious incident? I mean, when you're looking at that, we had such an incidents in Stolac, and around. When you're looking at the problem, do you think that among those reasons for such a serious consequences that the hard-liners, in this particular case, of Croat side, have been encouraged by the weakness of the international community, of the approach for such a-for similar crises so far, of approach of your office?

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Well, the explanation is clear, is that reconciliation and tolerance is not yet deep in the souls of the-of many, many people here in this country, unfortunately. We have many groups, not only in this particular case, not only with one or two authorities, or one particular constituent people. And fortunately, this is not yet the case although there is an improvement every day we can feel it. We can see it. But, of course we have to be very vigilant because now there are authorities sometimes, they are using the same language, and the same ideas, and the same ideology of the past.

The immediate explanation is that whenever there is progress, whenever there's an action, and whenever there is a movement towards the accomplishment of the goals of Dayton, that is to say, the return of the refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin-whenever this happens, there is sometimes a reaction. But, you know, as I told you, that these kind of reactions have to be stopped, and we are determined to do so.

(Senad Slatina – Slobodna Bosna) Q: Do you think that these measures are really strong enough? I mean, do you-what this particular incident will change in approach of your office? I mean, do you think with replacing a couple of people and with appointing 15 Serb policemen that you will guarantee security for Serb refugees in Drvar?

Carlos Westendorp, HR: Well, these measures are just the immediate measures that we have taken. And, I think we are-they are strong enough. But, we are ready to consider further measures, if these measures are not sufficient, and I-we are, as I told you, we are determined to make it work.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: We have for you outside copies of the letter sent today, by Elisabeth Rehn to President Ganic and Soljic, and also a press release from the European Commission on the European Commission condemning the murder in Drvar. There will be an OSCE press conference immediately after this-

Nicole Szulc, OSCE: No. We don’t need it now.

Alex Ivanko, UNMIBH: Okay, nothing then. Thank you ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

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