

High Representative welcomes clarifications by Presidency Member Izetbegovic regarding evictions

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, welcomes the clarifying statement issued by Presidency Member Alija Izetbegovic on September 10, following a meeting with the High Representative.

At that meeting, the High Representative had expressed his deep concern at recent press reports suggesting that Mr Izetbegovic had encouraged government officials and members of the judiciary to disregard the law and not issue and enforce eviction orders in certain cases concerning refugees.

Mr Izetbegovic subsequently, in his September 10 statement, clarified that “refugees who have applied for return, either have to be enabled to return to their homes, or, if this is not possible, have to be provided with accommodation that meets the hygienic and housing requirements of a refugee family. (...) A refugee who refuses to return to his home or rejects secondary accommodation that meets these requirements, is not protected and may be evicted.”

The High Representative wishes to emphasize that the property laws and other legislation applying to refugees and displaced people are designed to ensure that nobody is evicted onto the street. In certain cases, evictions are necessary and part of the returns process. One person’s eviction, regardless of how hurtful it is to that person, means another person’s return.

The High Representative calls upon all officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina to effectively implement the property laws, which are the legal framework for return and Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement. He commends those who have continued to carry out their obligations and uphold the Rule of Law under increasingly difficult conditions, which include threats to their personal safety. In this respect, the Sarajevo judiciary in particular is to be complimented for maintaining its independence.

The International Community fully supports the implementation of the property laws and works with the authorities to address cases in which difficult humanitarian questions arise.