

Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council in Sarajevo

A very productive session of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council was held in Sarajevo today, with renewed commitments made to the refugee return process, financial aid to the Republika Srpska, and preparations for the September elections.

REFUGEE RETURNS

The High Representative reported on the positive outcome of yesterday's Regional Conference on Refugee Returns in Banja Luka, and Steering Board members welcomed the renewed commitments of several parties. The High Representative emphasized the need for more to be done on a number of fronts, to prevent incidents such as those in Derventa and Drvar in recent days from recurring.

However the Steering Board members expressed strong disapproval at the failure of the Government of Croatia to respect its commitments to the rights of refugees. As a result, it was decided that proposed conference for reconstruction and development in Croatia would be postponed until an acceptable procedure is in place for refugee returns.

AID TO REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

Steering Board members agreed that it was essential to ensure equitable distribution of financial aid to both entities. Support by all members for the Dodik Government was underlined, as was the need to ensure this support was matched by international financial commitments. The High Representative proposed to try to ensure a fairer split of aid to both entities, to rectify the present imbalance. This suggestion was approved by all the main donors. The Steering Board underlined its support for the joint work of the High Representative and the OSCE in preparing for the September 1998 elections. In particular, the work of the Provisional Election Commission was applauded. It was agreed that the High Representative's media strategy was crucial to ensuring the climate of openness and equality necessary to these elections. To this end, the Steering Board members urged Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats to engage fully in the prompt restructuring of RTV BiH and public media, in line with democratic broadcasting standards.