

Press Statement on the Lifting of the Suspension of the ZOS procedure

Yesterday evening, Principals of the competent implementation agencies decided to lift the suspension of the Procedure for Return and Reconstruction in the Zone of Separation as of today. The Procedure was suspended on 12 November after several hundred individuals, armed with a number of weapons, had crossed the Inter Entity Boundary Line to occupy the village of Gajevi, located in the Zone of Separation between Celic and Koraj. This provocation and violation of the Procedure had triggered a disproportionate response by the RS police which went in with long barreled weapons, thus in turn violating the Procedure.

Principals have communicated their decision of lifting the suspension in a joint letter to the Members of the Presidency Mr. Izetbegovic, Mr. Zubak and Mr. Krajisnik as well as to the Presidents of the entities, Mr. Zubak in this capacity and Ms. Plavsic. The letter reads as follows:

“Today, we have decided to lift the suspension of the Procedure for Return and Reconstruction in the Zone of Separation which was put on hold on 12 November 1996. Our decision will become effective as of 26 November.

In recent talks with representatives from both entities, we were assured that in the future they would do their utmost to avoid incidents as the one in Gajevi, and strictly abide by the Procedure. In this context, be reminded of your obligation under Annex 7 of the Peace Agreement that “the parties take all necessary steps to prevent activities within their territories which would hinder or impede the safe and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons”.

The Procedure must be strictly respected. We insist that, under no circumstances, unauthorised weapons are to be brought into the Zone of Separation. We have given instruction that appropriate action be taken against persons found to be in possession of arms. Returnees, crossing the Inter Entity Boundary Line, need applications approved by the International Commission. Active soldiers and policemen will not take part. By signing their application to return, refugees and displaced persons accept to be subject to the laws of the receiving entity, in line with the Procedure. Returnees must know that police of the entities have the right and authority to police their side of the Zone of Separation, as laid down in the Procedure.

To have the Zone of Separation developed into a zone of safety and stability, we expect a complete halt to further provocations, in particular mining and burning of houses. It was disturbing to see that there were acts of destruction of houses also in the past week. We will use all our possibilities to counter such acts vigorously.

We have asked the governments of both entities to issue instructions to their regional and local authorities to ensure strict compliance with all provisions of the Procedure and to fully cooperate with the International Commission. We would be grateful if we could receive copies of these instructions.”

The letter is signed by Ambassador Steiner (OHR), General Crouch (IFOR), Commissioner Fitzgerald (UN IPTF) and Special Envoy Faubert (UNHCR). Copies of this letter are available for distribution.