OHR supports principle of Independent Judiciary in meetings with Kotorsko Demonstrators

Representatives of the Office of the High Representative met again on Tuesday with representatives of the Kotorsko returnees, who began demonstrating outside the OHR in Sarajevo on Monday. The demonstrators are demanding that OHR ban any construction on socially owned land allocated in Kotorsko to displaced persons and returnees for housing by the Doboj municipal authorities. This allocation was approved by the OHR last year. In March this year the Kotorsko residents began a court proceeding against the Republica Srpska before the BiH Chamber of Human Rights.

During Tuesday's meeting it quickly became clear that the Kotorsko demonstrators had little to add to their request, presented during Monday's meeting, for OHR to intervene in their case and prevent further building on the disputed land until the case is complete.

In April this year the Kotorsko demonstrators' legal representation requested a provisional order from the Chamber, effectively preventing further building on the land, but this request, upon review by the Chamber, was rejected. In effect the Kotorsko demonstrators are requesting the OHR to reverse this decision. o reverse this decision.

The Office of the High Representative fully supports the democratic principle of an independent judiciary, and the work of the Human Rights Chamber. No institution or individual should try to influence or in any way subvert the authority of any court in BiH. OHR has continuously stressed the need to

establish the rule of law in BiH and the OHR urged the Kotorsko demonstrators to present their case through the established procedures of the Chamber.

The Kotorsko representatives had already met with Ambassador Ralph Johnson, the then Principal Deputy High Representative, in February of this year. At this meeting the Kotorsko representatives stated that the socially owned land that the High Representative had exempted from his general ban on the re-allocation of socially owned land, had not been expropriated legally under the communist system. At this time the PDHR advised that the issue should be brought before a competent court for resolution, not the Office of the High Representative.

The Office of the High Representative will follow closely the case before the Chamber, and remains ready to meet with representatives of the Kotorsko demonstrators, or their legal representation, if any new details emerge.