

High Representative appalled at Trebinje Violence

The High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, condemns in the strongest terms today's outbreak of violence in Trebinje before the beginning of a ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the Osman Pasha Mosque. The Special Envoy of the Office of the High Representative to Trebinje, Daniel Ruiz, was injured, and the ceremony had to be postponed.

"I am appalled that more than five years after the war, tolerance and respect for Bosnia and Herzegovina's different faiths have yet to become a matter of course," the High Representative said. "Such a display of uncivilised and brutal behaviour is utterly unacceptable and an embarrassment for the RS."

Freedom of religious expression is a basic human right enshrined in international law and the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those who oppose these rights are opposed to the Dayton peace process.

Civilians and international and domestic dignitaries, including BiH Presidency members Beriz Belkic and Karlo Filipovic, the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Julian Harston, the German Ambassador to BiH Hans Jochen Peters, the Mayor of Zaragzoga, Ambassador Colin Munro, Head of OHR Regional Office South, and Ambassador Valerie Sluijter, Head of the Return and Reconstruction Task Force, were attending a ceremony dedicated to laying the corner stone for the Trebinje mosque.

The ceremony never got underway as a hostile crowd including men waving black flags started to hurl abuse and throw stones at the participants of the ceremony. Most took shelter in a nearby Islamic Community Centre, but the OHR's Special Envoy to Trebinje, Daniel Ruiz, suffered slight injuries when three demonstrators attacked him. The High Representative sends his best wishes to Daniel Ruiz and will continue to support Mr. Ruiz's efforts in ensuring the implementation of the peace agreement in this area of Eastern Herzegovina.

UNMIBH's International Police Task Force will look into the seemingly passive role of the local police during the day. The High Representative expects the local police to conduct a thorough investigation into this incident, and that the perpetrators of the violence be brought before the courts.

The High Representative calls on the authorities of the RS to condemn this incident and stand up for law and order and respect for different religions. In light of the upcoming ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka on Monday, the High Representative urges everybody to respect the dignity of this event, and expects the authorities ensure the security of the participants.