

Human Rights Task Force Sets Priorities For 2001

The Human Rights Task Force, comprising the principals of the main international organizations operating in BiH (OHR, OSCE, UNHCR, UNHCHR and UNMiBH), met today, to establish and endorse human rights priorities for 2001. The BiH Minister for Human Rights and Refugees, Mr Martin Raguz, also attended the meeting, as did the heads of other agencies and representatives from domestic human rights institutions.

The meeting, chaired by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, emphasized five areas in which the international community will concentrate its efforts in 2001.

- First, the return of refugees and displaced persons will remain a central goal in 2001. Minority return figures (52,000 in the year 2000), indicate that significant progress was made in the past year. However, despite strong pressure on the local authorities responsible for implementing property legislation, progress in many areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be unacceptably small, the overall implementation rate increasing from 8% to 20% in 2000. The main reason for this is the slow rate of change in the political environment, and political obstructionism in general.
- Second, more needs to be done with regard to reforming judicial and police systems. The Human Rights Task Force welcomed the recently established Independent Judicial Commission (IJC) which will be instrumental in overseeing and facilitating changes within the judiciary in BiH.
- Third, efforts to create a sustainable domestic structure capable of meeting the priorities established for BiH human rights institutions are also required. The High Representative stressed the importance of

increasing the rate of implementation of decisions and reports of the Human Rights Chamber and Ombudsman Institutions in BiH in 2001.

- Fourth, the international community will take action in identifying and removing people in public offices who fail to perform in accordance with applicable legislation.
- Fifth, it was stressed by the Human Rights Task Force that Bosnia and Herzegovina must respect international treaty obligations, including complying with ICTY requests and preparing and submitting overdue reports to human rights treaty bodies.

The High Representative emphasized that promoting the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina needs not only continuous international efforts but also strong domestic involvement.

The priorities and recommendations of the Human Rights Task Force endorsed in the meeting are available at the Office of the High Representative.