School Subject “Culture of Religions”

Following contradictory and negative statements published over the past few months on the subject of “culture of religions” for primary and secondary education in BiH, the Office of the High Representative wishes to provide the public with clearer information on this issue.

This subject is part and parcel of the 10 May 2000 Education Agreement signed by the Entity Ministers of Education and later endorsed by the Cantonal Ministers of Education.

Point 3 of the 10 May Education Agreement states: *“While each constituent people of Bosnia and Herzegovina is entitled to preserve and develop its own cultural and linguistic heritage, common and shared elements which facilitate inter-cultural understanding and communication should be stressed and reflected in all curricula and relevant textbooks. Measures to be taken throughout the country include the teaching of both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, the teaching of the shared literary and cultural heritage of the three communities, and teaching about all major religions practised in BiH.”*

The new subject “culture of religions” is not designed in any way to replace religious instruction where it is taught. It is meant to provide objective, non- discriminatory information to all pupils on the four major religions practised in BiH and their respective traditions. It will allow for freedom of movement and promote tolerance and reconciliation.

In the initial stage, the subject “culture of religions” should be one of the “modules for language, literature and culture,” which UNESCO is currently developing in co-operation with local experts appointed by the respective Entity Ministers. It will then become part of all the curricula used

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If individual schools decide to continue to teach religious instruction in addition, the OHR would find it desirable if they covered the religions of all the pupils attending the school.

In June 2000, the Entity Ministers of Education were asked to examine how this vital subject can be introduced in the already overloaded curricula and in which way the religious communities and their experts can contribute to its development and teaching. This item will be on the agenda of the up-coming meeting of the Conference of Entity Ministers of Education on 5 December 2000.