

OHR, OSCE and UNMIBH condemn Destruction of Mosques in Banja Luka Seven Years ago

Sunday, May 7th will mark the passing of seven years since the destruction of two of the most important cultural sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ferhadija and Arnaudija mosques in Banja Luka.

These mosques were given and still hold the highest cultural protection in RS law. Their destruction was not linked to any war activity in Banja Luka, but constituted barbaric acts of vandalism.

The OHR, the OSCE and UNMIBH take this opportunity to renew their condemnation of these acts, and call upon the authorities to take all necessary steps within the law to prosecute those responsible.

The OHR, the OSCE and UNMIBH further call upon the Republika Srpska to live up to its obligations under Annex 6 of the Dayton Peace Agreement and implement the June 1999 Decision of the Human Rights Chamber. That Decision ordered the Republika Srpska to approve requests, filed in March 1997 to the authorities of Banja Luka, to permit the reconstruction of seven mosques in Banja Luka, to permit enclosures to be placed around all sites and to prevent further tampering with the locations. The fact that this Decision has not been implemented ten months after its delivery raises serious questions about the commitment of the RS to its human rights obligations imbedded in the European Convention on Human Rights and required for Council of Europe membership.

Permission is sought to rebuild these mosques. RS and Banja Luka authorities have not yet provided it. It is time that

permission be granted.

The High Representative, the Head of the OSCE in BiH and the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations reiterate that BiH has a future in Europe. This future, however, must be based on tolerance and respect for the cultural heritage and religious freedom of all peoples of BiH.