# Hotel Ero, Mostar, 14:30 hrs, 30 September 1999

**Chris Riley, OHR (South):** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and thank you for coming at such a short notice. I would like to welcome the Principal Deputy HR, Ambassador Ralph Johnson. He has got a short statement for you and we will be available to take questions afterwards.

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** Thank you very much for being in attendance. As you know, I have come to Mostar for two reasons: one is to bid farewell to Ambassador Richard Ellerkmann and his wife Marianne and to say that we in OHR Sarajevo value his work and Marianne's work very highly. So I wanted to come here and see him and to pay him the respect that we all feel for him in Sarajevo.

Secondly, although this is by no means my first visit to Mostar, I also am here in order – in this capacity – to make the acquaintance of officials of the Canton, of the Municipality and to begin to get the people outside the Government in Mostar as well. So, as I leave to return to Sarajevo, I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you and I have a few things that I would like to say. And then I would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have assuming, naturally, that I can direct all the difficult questions to Richard Ellerkmann.

First of all, let me say that the word **OWNERSHIP** is a word that Wolfgang Petritsch, the new High Representative, and all of us are using a lot. And I want to say a word about what we mean. What we mean is that not just city officials and cantonal officials and national officials must take more responsibility, but also that citizens – you – must take more responsibility to hold your leaders, your elected leaders accountable for their actions. For our part, we in the Office

of the High Representative remain fully prepared to use all of our authorities. I think that our first few weeks in our positions have shown that we are prepared to do that. But the reality is that more responsibility must be taken by you and by your elected officials to make decisions rather than leaving them all to the IC. So, we'll be prepared to use our powers, to use our authorities. But now, the time has come for you as citizens to use your powers, your authority and to hold your leaders accountable.

Another topic that arose during my visit here was the question of whether decisions that have been taken by the High Representative are constitutional or unconstitutional. My experience is that these arguments are normally made by people who do not want to respect those decisions. The legal ground is very clear and we are confident that our decisions are both legal and constitutional. So I simply want to make clear that we are not going to be persuaded by arguments about the constitutionality or the appropriateness of our decisions. And when we must take decisions – as we have – we will expect them to be implemented.

Let me say that I have been encouraged that I think some progress has been made in the areas such as the adoption of some legislation and, I must say here, also by the creation of a single account, a single budget account. It seems to me that, with respect to the law, the issue more and more is becoming one of implementing the law or implementing the decisions that are made by the court system. And it is in this area of implementation that I think it is very important as well for the citizens to insist upon the accountability on behalf of their officials.

Also, let me say a word if I may about returns. This year we are encouraged that, in general, we are seeing a substantial number of what I would call a spontaneous returns of DPs. We think that that is a very positive sign. Some say that, when these returns take place, it then is the sole responsibility

of the IC to make sure that they are provided with the accommodation and with infrastructure. The IC accepts that it has a role to play in facilitating returns, but the point that I would make is that cantonal and municipal officials also must play their role and that role is the primary role in providing for those who return. So, once again, we are prepared to be helpful in any way that we can, but it is wrong to say that the primary responsibility for returns in this country is with the IC.

As we talk about returns in the context of Mostar, I think it's important to say one or two specific things: in my conversations this morning with officials at all levels, I made clear that we are greatly concerned about the lack of progress in returns to West Mostar, returns in general to the centre of Mostar. Too much time has passed without more concrete results. And now much more needs to be done to accelerate this process. Virtually everyone has expressed their concern – on all sides – about the incident that occurred in Ilici this week. And I simply want to say that, from the standpoint of the OHR, fortunately this incident is unusual in the context of Mostar. But no incident of this kind can be acceptable – first and foremost to the people of this city – that I rely on the commitment which has been expressed to me by officials of the Canton and the City to determine who perpetrated this act and to hold them accountable. Because this incident must continue to be an exception, must not be repeated.

Let me say a word about opportunities for cooperation. Recently I had the pleasure of signing the letter which transferred the Mostar Airport to the control of the City. I see this as a sign of great progress, a real accomplishment by Ambassador Ellerkmann and all of those in the IC who helped make it happen. And at the same time, this is an opportunity. An opportunity now for this city and the city officials to manage and to run this Airport in the way that benefits all

the citizens of this region. There are as yet a few formalities to be completed among themselves by the officials of the city. But the Airport is now in their hands. And therefore I want to say first that we in the IC are prepared to work with you in helping this Airport to be as prosperous and successful as possible. But you should be proud with this accomplishment, that is that this Airport has once again passed into the hands of the City. And I urge the citizens of this city to follow the development on the Airport carefully because – after all – it is yours and to take pride in the fact it is now, once again, in your possession. The Airport also offers yet another opportunity to show how groups within Mostar can cooperate with one another to make this a success.

Finally, I want to thank cantonal officials and city officials for their cooperation with Ambassador Ellerkmann during his tenure, for their hospitality which they have shown me during my stay here this time and to say that I look forward to working with them and to being in contact with a wide variety of groups here in Mostar during my tenure at OHR. In that case – I have probably said already too much – so I am happy to invite your questions.

**Questions:**

**Pejo Gasparevic, HINA & BBC:** Mr. Johnson, could you satisfy journalist's curiosity and give us indications at least on who the new, future Head of the ROHR in Mostar could be? Let me be more specific, if you allow: will that person be from Europe of the USA?

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** You know, I find it's always dangerous to satisfy journalist's curiosity. But in this case I can tell you: I would if I could. And I wish I can tell you that we had a successor lined up who would be here immediately to replace Ambassador Ellerkmann or where that individual was coming from. But we do not have yet the answer to that question. But I can assure you is that his able deputy and his

team in Mostar will have a very strong support of Sarajevo during this interim period. Sometimes I think people believe the IC necessarily functions in a smooth and well-organised fashion. I can assure you that's not the case. So I'll be working hard to find a strong successor to Richard and we will certainly let you know when we have succeeded. In the meantime, his strong team, as I say, will have our full support from Sarajevo.

**Mirsad Behram, RTVMO, VoA:** Ambassador Johnson, as much as I know your instructions sent to the mayors of Stolac, Capljina and Bugojno regarding the education of returnees' children have not been implemented. What will be the next step of OHR? Will those people bear consequences, will there be any sanctions? Will the children finally start going to school?

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** Let me give my best answer to that question. I think that every parent must be concerned when their child does not have access to proper schooling. Because, in my view, the future of this country – if it is to be a multi-ethnic society – rests on, in part, having children educated together regardless of their ethnic origins. And I, frankly, cannot find any acceptable excuse for keeping children out of classrooms. I am also not na?ve. Yesterday we had a very interesting meeting in Sarajevo with a wide group of people from different backgrounds, education, youth groups – some from Government, some from political parties, to talk about how do we tackle this problem, not just in some municipalities but as a general matter. Because this is much more than a problem in a few municipalities, it's a wider problem. And so we are trying to see if we can approach a solution which would have a broader impact. In the meantime, I will say that the issue was entirely open with regard to what further steps we may take in the cases of these municipalities.

**Miroslav Landeka, Slobodna B&H:** I would like to have Mr. Johnson's clarification – it seems I did not hear well – did

you say there have been no returns in Mostar West? Or that there have not been sufficient amount of returns there?

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** What I said was that one of the issues of principal concern is the question is post-Dayton eviction from Mostar West and the lack of progress in resolving those issues; and I also said, and here I am recounting what I said in my meetings with officials here that there is a more general concern in the IC and OHR with regard to the almost non-existent returns in the central areas in Mostar.

**Blazica Kristo, HTV Mostar, Oscar C:** At the last session of the City Council, it was said that during the international Interim Airport Authority over the Mostar Airport, the Airport made a debt of 220,000 DM. It was said then that the IC will, upon the transfer of the Airport authority to the City of Mostar, cover the debt. Has this been done?

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** Yes. The answer is yes. I would say furthermore that does not begin to take into account the investments which have been made in the Mostar Airport by the IC, which are far in excess of those amounts.

**Faruk Kajtaz, Youth Radio X, Deutsche Welle:** Why has there been a turn in the IC's policy towards B&H? What should the thesis "europesation" of the Dayton mean? The thesis frequently mentioned?

**Ambassador Ralph Johnson:** I do not think that there's been any change in terms of the policy of the IC towards B&H. I think our policy continues to be the support to continued development of the multi-ethnic society, of the democratic society and of the institutions that must underpin that society including, of course, a functioning economy. I think we have reached a transition point in this sense. That we have come – in terms of time – a long way from Dayton. And also in terms of what has been accomplished inn this country. So, it's

time – at least in the view of those in the OHR – for the people, you, your leaders, to begin to assume more of the responsibility which has until now been exercised by the IC.

**Chris Riley, OHR (South):** Any more? Thank you very much.