

Coalition Press Information Center Sarajevo, 19 August 1999

Alexandra Stiglmayer, OHR: Good morning. Most of you are probably familiar with the two ambassadors, but I'd like to introduce them just in case. This is Ambassador Robert Farrand, deputy High Representative and Brcko supervisor, and Ambassador Ralph Johnson, the principal deputy High Representative. They're going to talk about the annex to the Brcko award that was released in Washington yesterday, and answer questions on this subject only, so please don't ask any questions about corruption, I'm happy to answer them later. We would also like to apologize for the delay: Ambassador Johnson was at the memorial service on Mount Igman for the three American officials who were killed there in 1995. And if you would like to start now.

Ralph Johnson, OHR: Fine. Thank you very much, thank you for your patience, it's nice to see you again today, though I don't expect to be seeing you every day, and you probably don't expect to be seeing me every day here as well. Ambassador Farrand and I are here to talk to you briefly about the final version of the annex to the Brcko award. That award, as I think many of you will know, was released in the United States yesterday. Ambassador Farrand gave a press conference yesterday afternoon in Brcko. When the annexes were released, they were simultaneously distributed in Bosnia to the Republika Srpska authorities and to the Federation government at two o'clock yesterday. The final version of the annex replaces the initial version, which had been released with the Brcko award in March. The arbitrator, as you will recall, provided a period for comments, comments from the Entity governments and also comments from other interested parties, as he put it, to identify parts of the annex that either were not realistic or where the fairness of the annexes ought to be improved.

What I think you will find is that the final version of this document touches on the same topics as the earlier version with an additional item on military transit. We understand from the arbitrator that he has refined the text to reflect all of the comments that were received, with the exception of those which were either excessively detailed or which he felt were contrary to the spirit of Dayton or to the spirit of the award. Like the entire award, these annexes are, of course, a compromise. No one is going to be entirely satisfied, but I think all sides will find improvements in this final version, and will see evidence that their views have been taken into account.

Today, it's important to note that we bring to a close the arbitration phase of Brcko. Now we must move quickly forward with implementation. The High Representative, Mr. Petritsch, Ambassador Farrand and myself and our colleagues in the international community are committed to seeing this award become a reality as soon as possible. I know that Ambassador Farrand has used his time since last March to set in place a strategy and a framework for implementation. But implementation will require the full cooperation from Entity governments, and we will also be holding both the Federation and the RS to their Dayton commitment to abide by the arbitrator's ruling. I repeat, this is a ruling of the arbitrator, it is not a ruling of the OHR or anyone else. Before I hand over to Ambassador Farrand, who will speak in further detail about the content of the annexes, I'd like to commend the work of the Tribunal, which has produced both the final award and the annex. I am convinced, and I think you will be, that they are balanced and just: there are no winners and no losers here. Perhaps there are winners: the winners are the people who live in the Brcko opstina, and for whom the award and the annexes constitute the best hope of finding a prosperous and secure future. With those few introductory remarks, let me hand over to Ambassador Farrand.

Robert Farrand, OHR: Thank you, Ambassador Johnson. I, of course, agree with what the principal deputy High Representative has just said, so let me add just a few more points. Since the final award was issued on the 5th of March, and from that point until yesterday when the revised annex became an integral part of the award, my office has been working day and night to prepare for the moment when implementation can finally begin. This moment has now arrived, and we are ready. Judge Finn Lyringheim, a distinguished jurist from Norway, with whom many of you may be familiar in his capacity working with, as chairman of the OSCE's Electoral Appeals Sub-Commission here in Sarajevo, has been invited, I invited him to come on my staff in Brcko, and he has now formed a team of Bosnian and international lawyers to carry out the law revision process which is called for in the final award - it's one of the most important aspects of the final award. The judge and his team will now work to harmonize, or, as and where necessary, revise the laws of the Federation and Republika Srpska so that the rule of law can be put firmly in place now, in the entire new Brcko district once it is declared.

The highest priority now is to put in place a district statute. I am looking forward to receiving from state and entity leaders names of candidates for the Joint Implementation Commission described in paragraph 38 of the final

award, and the process of consulting with those state and entity leaders has already begun, and it will continue in coming days and weeks. I am very happy that Ambassador Johnson has found time to accompany me on those visits and lend full support to what we now have in front of us in Brcko. We will move forward with implementation in Brcko energetically, but also, and I want to stress this, in a peaceful, phased and orderly manner – as we have been doing since the period of supervision began in April 1997 when I first arrived in Brcko.

Let me repeat here what I said yesterday in Brcko, and that is that it's my firm intention to proceed in the spirit of full cooperation with all the parties, including both entities. At the same time, I call on the parties to cooperate with one another and with the High Representative and myself for the benefit of the people of Brcko and, not incidentally, for the benefit of all of BiH. Since I firmly believe that if we can make this work in Brcko, then Dayton will work elsewhere, and I think that is a very important point to stress at this morning's press conference. Last February, at a lecture that I gave here in Sarajevo, I referred to Brcko as "the mother of all hope". The completion of the arbitration process gives renewed hope to the people of Brcko, and to Bosnian and Herzegovina, that the Dayton peace process will become a permanent part of their lives. With care and dedication to the principles of Dayton, and to the principles of the final award, the Brcko opstina will become the most progressive, prosperous and ethnically mixed community in Bosnia – Herzegovina, and we will try very hard to turn this hope into a reality.

Alexandra Stiglmayer, OHR: So, if you have questions?

Q: Ambassador Farrand, please: can you give us a time table when do you believe you will have the district statute and the executive board established, and what do you see as a main obstacle in the implementation phase now?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Well, first, as regards time tables, if you read the final award you'll see that the presiding arbitrator and the tribunal has set the end of the year, or as he put it, "shortly thereafter," quote – unquote, for the realization of much of what is included in the annex. That is a very ambitious set of work goals, and my supposition is that we will meet them as we move forward. But I am hoping that with the addition of new staff that will be coming on next week that we can put this on an accelerated track, but I cannot give you any specific deadlines right here. I've learned over time never to do that, so all I can say is we're going to work as hard as we can to put this in place. But the first priority is the new district statute, and you were correct to point that out, and that I'm hoping to see in a very short period of time.

Q: What do you fear might be a main obstacle now in the implementation phase?

Robert Farrand, OHR: I'm not sure that we're going to have really serious obstacles now. Clearly, the nationalist parties will do what they can to jockey for position, but in the Brcko opstina we have a good bit of cooperation already in place, and we have people working together that two years ago I would have been surprised would sit down at the same table.

Q: Ambassador, have you been in touch with the entity officials so far, and can you tell us what were their first reactions?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Ambassador Johnson and I were in Banja Luka two days ago, we spoke there with the vice premier because the prime minister is on vacation. He was, he and his team, were most interested in what we had to say. We did not, at that time, deliver the final annex because we didn't have it in hand. We wouldn't have anyway, because it was embargoed, to be released by the presiding arbitrator, until yesterday. But in any case, we knew in broad outline what it contained, and he expressed, obviously extremely close interest in everything we had to say. I detected a mood of determination to make this, to make this work. We flew immediately from Banja Luka to Sarajevo, where we spoke with the president and vice-president of the Federation, and we had a similar reception there. So I think that there is a great deal of determination here to come together and work with me in Brcko to make this, to make this work.

Q: I am a journalist from Vecernje Novine, daily newspaper from Sarajevo. Ambassador Farrand, will you positively respond to the request of HDZ from Brcko about extending territory of Brcko opstina?

Robert Farrand, OHR: The extension of the territory...you're speaking about the HDZ proposal to extend it to six villages, which are to the south, southwest of Brcko opstina? I think that matter is going to have to be delayed, I think that cannot be looked at now in a serious way.

Q: And second question: do you have any idea about date for holding elections for municipality council in Brcko?

Robert Farrand, OHR: No, it's premature to speculate on when elections will be held in Brcko.

Q: SDS party protested recently over the withdrawal of the RS armed forces from Brcko district area. Can you comment on that, and if you can elaborate that military issue, how it's going to be solved in the district?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Yeah, I'll be happy to. I am in close discussion with SFOR now and have been for the past several months on the process of demilitarizing the Brcko opstina. Now, what must be understood is that not only the 301stst will have to locate, the VRS, but also elements of the ABiH and those reserve elements of the HVO that are also found south of, in the opstina. Clearly they are not the same numbers; the numbers aren't equivalent, but they will also have to vacate the area. I want to simply say this: that my mandate is to bring about change in Brcko in a peaceful, phased and orderly way. There will be no shocks administered to this system. And therefore, when it comes to demilitarization, we recognize fully the sense on the part of the people that when the military leaves, somehow the security situation will become in some way less secure or unstable. Well, that's absolutely misplaced. We understand the need for maintaining security, so therefore as the military is withdrawn, the police will be there, and the training of the police and the readiness of the police to take on the responsibilities which they have anyway. I have to tell you, the presence or the non-presence of the military in Brcko does nothing for the security situation. We have SFOR sitting right in the middle of Brcko, you have the police performing effectively, multi-ethnically. I'll go further: it's tri-ethnic police. Now, I could be wrong, but I think that this is perhaps the only community in BiH where we have tri-ethnic police. They're patrolling on the streets, they're training together, they need more training, they need more numbers, they will increase in numbers too. So I would like to say to everyone that this will be done in a very careful way. Every step will be carefully planned.

Q: But are the armed forces going to stay in Brcko district until municipal authorities are established?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Well, these things will move in parallel, parallel tracks. Probably the answer is yes, but if it is possible to make this change before, maybe we will have to do that. Remember, this is August, and the end of the year, the end of century and the end of the millennium is coming up. There's a lot of things coming up, in addition to the final award, so there's a lot of things we have to get ready for here. Also, ladies and gentleman and to your viewers, let's not forget that the movement of the armed forces all over BiH – since we're talking about the Posavina Corridor, I'll just be specific on that – is already done with the permission of SFOR. So I really see no change. It's a psychological issue, essentially.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, which kind of reflection implementation of this paper will have on process of returns? Are you expecting, because it's obviously a lot of trouble to have to do in Brcko, but that process of coming back of refugees will be slower, or maybe you have special plan for that?

Robert Farrand, OHR: I think, first off, that there is kind of two ways of looking at what is happening to the Brcko district when it happens. On the one hand, I hear a lot of people, particularly in the Republika Srpska, unhappy and concerned. But, I hear just as many people in Republika Srpska ready to accept the inevitability of what has become an answer to a problem which, I would remind everybody, virtually stopped the Dayton peace process. And for us to be sitting here today discussing a decision which has found a way of, in a way as the ambassador said, a way in which nobody gets everything they want; there are no losers, and there are no winners. I think that this is wisdom of an uncommon sort. If there was another way to respond and to solve this problem, I don't know it. And I believe that many sensible and many thoughtful people in Brcko have come to me and told me that – they said, this agreement is the only way, let's get going. Now, I've been around long enough to know that a lot of people won't say that in public, and you've been around long enough to know that, too. But it's a fact. Now, on return...what I'm really going to say is this: I think Brcko opstina is going to become a very attractive place. It's going to become an attractive place for people to come back, and it will just take time for us in order to get this message out. We're probably going to hear a lot on the course of the next couple of days, a lot of anti-rhetoric, a lot of negative rhetoric. I fully expect that...they have to blow off their steam, and they will do that. But I think people will come back. The biggest problem for return right now is funds for reconstruction. That is the key problem that we all have to focus on.

Q: This means that you didn't have still money which was promised for Brcko at last donors conference?

Robert Farrand, OHR: You mean the trust fund for Brcko, did you say?

Q: From last donors' conference, it was in April for Brcko district. Are you satisfied with the speed how that money is coming to Brcko.

Robert Farrand, OHR: No.

Q: How much of that promise has come already?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Well, not many promises were made, but we're...on the one hand, when I say I'm not happy, that's true, because I'm never happy. But when you talk about the funding that comes...very few promises were made. I have to pursue that; we are pursuing that now. I have a staff that I am actually sending around to governments talking about this very thing, and working closely with OHR, Sarajevo and the High Representative, we hope to re-stimulate commitment to this. We all know, don't we, that all problems in the region are beginning to compete for funding. The High Representative made that statement clear yesterday, that we now, in the Office of the High Representative, and that would include the Office of the Supervisor of Brcko, we have to become very, very insistent and very energetic now to pursue the resources we need to do the job that we have to do.

Q: And last question, please: do you expecting any kind of money support for implementation of this paper from international community, because this is very big process?

Robert Farrand, OHR: Yes, I expect people will pull behind this and help me get this done, yes I do.

Alexandra Stiglmayer, OHR: No more questions? Thank you very much.