

# **Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar**

## **Press Conference of the International Organizations seated in Mostar**

8 January 2003

	<b>Spokesperson</b>	<b>Topic</b>
OHR	Avis Benes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Latest PLIP statistics</li><li>• Denial of existence of alleged list of 'unsuitable lawyers'</li></ul>
SFOR	Maj. Fix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No statement</li></ul>

### **Avis Benes - OHR**

Good day, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the press conference of two international organizations seated in Mostar. I would like to greet you all, wish you all the best in this year and express hope that our good co-operation will continue this year as it was during all previous years. For those who celebrate Orthodox Christmas, I wish them all the best for the second day of Christmas. Also, I would like to wish you a warm welcome to our new premises. As you could see, the security procedure is a bit different than it was the case with the Ero Hotel but let me assure you that these are usual procedures in other international organizations in Sarajevo and here.

On behalf of the OHR, I have two brief points for you today. The first one regards the property law implementation statistics as of the end of November 2002. You probably already received the press release which was sent six days ago. However, it was a general one and the statistics were not available on the website. Let me remind you once again that the implementation rate for the whole country as of the end of November 2002 is 67%. The rate in Brcko District is 73%, 71% in the Federation and 61% in the Republika Srpska. I would also like to mention that out of a total number of registered claims for repossession of property, 82.000 have not been resolved yet. The overall increase of the implementation rate is primarily the result of decrease of the number of registered claims. According to the housing offices, the reasons for such a situation is the current audit of data and exclusion of destroyed property from these statistics. These data are available on our website. For those of you who do not have the access to the Internet, you can get them through our office. Tomorrow they will be published in some daily papers, Nezavisne Novine, Glas Srpski, Dnevni Avaz and Dnevni List. As for the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, let me note that the implementation rate has risen above the Federation level.

My second, very brief, point regards something that we have already clarified but it seems that this media story spreads around - the alleged OHR's list of "unsuitable lawyers". In any case, such a list or such a story is not at all grounded in reality and it is an absolute figment of imagination. Such a list does not exist. If there are any problems with the work of lawyers this should be dealt with by Bar Associations as is the case in any other country.

That is all on behalf of the OHR. I hope you all have received our new telephone and fax numbers, if not please address Sandra and our office.

Now, I would like to greet Maj. Fix. Do you have anything special?

### **Maj. Fix - SFOR:**

No, I have no statement for today.

### **Avis Benes - OHR:**

SFOR does not have a statement for today. Now, it is time for your questions if there are any.

## **Questions:**

**Q: Pejo Gasparevic (HINA):** Question for Major Fix. I hope my question is belated, but this is the first press conference since the incident in Kostajnica near Konjic occurred. Could you tell us what is SFOR's knowledge about undesirable groups of people, whose ideas are unacceptable for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the so called vehabijas,

in the region of Konjic? Let me remind you that Muamer Topalovic's parents confessed that their son was indoctrinated in this sense in the village of Ostrozac.

**A: Maj. Fix:** Multi-National Brigade South-East pays a lot of attention to the affair which occurred in Kostajnica. The Islamist organizations you implied are, of course, well known by our intelligence service. I would not like to speculate about Mr. Topalovic's membership in one of these organizations. Speaking about intelligence, you must understand that I cannot speak a lot about this subject here. The investigation concerning this organization is firstly the matter for local police and of course security services in BiH. But be sure that we are keeping an eye on all the events that occur, which are appearing and which are going on in different parts of BiH. And moreover I would stress the good co-operation with the EUPM liaison officers who are now among our unit. That's all I have on this.

**Q: Ilko Barbaric (HRT Zagreb):** A question for Avis. In public or, to be more precise, in a part of public there is a popular belief that the OHR applies double standards when it comes to the reconstruction of mosques or the halt of reconstruction of mosques on the remains of Christian basilicas and facilities. A permission was granted for the reconstruction of the mosque in Stolac but it was denied for the mosque in Bijeljina. There is a popular belief that this issue is being manipulated. Why is it so?

**A: Avis Benes:** Well, as for the public perception, a simple answer would be that media also have contributed to the reason why it is like that. However I understand your question. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February last year, the High Representative passed and harmonised entity laws concerning national and religious monuments destroyed during the war. He also clearly defined which bodies are competent to issue reconstruction permits. The OHR fully supports the fact that permits for reconstruction must exist and should be issued by the competent bodies of authority in accordance with the law. Also, it is absolutely not disputable that in accordance with Annex 8 there is the right of people to reconstruct religious cultural facilities destroyed during the war in a violent and vandal manner. As far as the mentioned mosques are concerned, they both have been granted a reconstruction permit. And the OHR fully supports their reconstruction. That would be all.

**Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88):** Adding to the previous question – what is your comment on the statement given by Mayor of Stolac Obradovic, as reported by some media, that the reconstruction of Stolac mosque in an act of destabilisation of relations in Stolac?

**A: Avis Benes:** Respect for other cultures, religious monuments, reconstruction of religious monuments should in principle be acts of stabilisation. We hope everyone will realize that soon.

**Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88):** I have two more questions. Namely, when will there be the concordance of the OHR to the C7 Prime Minister designate?

And are you familiar with the letter that the Trade Union from, conditionally speaking, Bosniac majority areas of this Canton addressed to the High Representative Paddy Ashdown regarding their intention to block the cantonal account since the Government has not yet fulfilled its obligation regarding the payment of the two outstanding salaries from the last year. Actually, the procedure for blockage of the cantonal account has already been initiated.

**A: Avis Benes:** Frankly, I have not seen that request. I would have to check with our office in Sarajevo.

As for the Prime Minister designate, a certain opinion has been requested from the OHR and the OHR provided it. In any case, we expect the person who is to occupy the position to be competent and to approach establishing of the Government as soon as possible.

**Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88):** Does it mean that the OHR gave a positive response?

**A: Avis Benes:** We have expressed some reservations.

**Q: Denis Vila (RTV Mostar):** Could you tell us whether the OHR is following up the cases of illegal construction in the Central Zone. The issue was raised a couple of months ago. Perhaps you could give us the update?

**A: Avis Benes:** No, we do not have any information. The right address to address your question, as you yourself know, is the City Administration. As I said before and I can reiterate, the OHR is really of the opinion that the City Administration should assume the full responsibility for this matter.

Q: Denis Vila (RTV Mostar): Do you think that they are not doing their share of work with regard to this matter?

A: Avis Benes: In any case, there is a room for progress and improvement.

Q: Denis Vila (RTV Mostar): Would you allow me one additional question?

A: Avis Benes: Yes, if there is nobody else.

Q: Denis Vila (RTV Mostar): To what extent, in your opinion, have the parallelisms in the city of Mostar been abolished?

A: Avis Benes: Unfortunately, parallelisms do still exist even though work is being done and our office is active in that direction as well on reduction of the existing percentage of parallelisms. What I can say is that one of the plans and one of the main guidelines of our Office for this year is to actually simply abolish parallelisms that exist in the city, to strengthen the City Administration and for the city to unify in a normal manner.

Q: Denis Vila (RTV Mostar): And how is that going to be achieved?

A: Avis Benes: It is a process. It is a process, which will surely not be successful if the OHR would be the only one to implement it. It has to be carried out in co-operation with the local authorities and with your assistance as well.

Q: Dario Mehmedovic (FED TV): I would like to refer to the question of the election of the Cantonal Prime Minister designate. You expressed your position but I would like to know specifically if it means that you are going to refuse the proposal of Mr. Coric to the position of the Prime Minister?

A: Avis Benes: I shall just repeat that we have expressed certain reservations.

Q: Tina Jelin (Studio 88): You said that the property laws implementation rate in this Canton is above the Federation level. What are the concrete results in the City of Mostar since, as we know, there are a lot of people who repossessed their property but are not actually using it, they do not live in it? Are we talking about the return of people or repossession of property?

A: Avis Benes: These statistics reflect the repossession of property, not the return of people itself.