Column by Ambassador Bond “Srebrenica: a Six-Month Report”

Mid-way through my one-year mandate I want to report the progress that has been made – by state, entity and municipal officials and international organizations working constructively together – to improve living conditions in the Srebrenica area.

We had to begin by reducing political tensions and creating space for dialogue. The decision to move the church from private land in Konjevic Polje to a new location was important because it underscored that in all Bosnia and Herzegovina the rights of citizens, regardless of ethnicity, must be respected. The sooner this decision is implemented, the more confidence will be accomplished.

This is a small step when set against the continued liberty of many of those who planned and committed the genocide in Srebrenica. The action of High Representative Miroslav Lajčák from early July, adopted in coordination with the RS authorities, to accelerate investigations of suspects from the Srebrenica List was important in confirming to the public and the victims that individuals who played a part in the atrocity at Srebrenica will eventually be brought to justice. The decision to fund a team of international investigators and to open a branch of the State Prosecutor’s Office in Srebrenica will reinforce this effort.

Another significant initiative was the decision by former High Representative Schwarz-Schilling to place legal authority for the Srebrenica/Potocari Memorial and Cemetery at the state level and to provide for its security through SIPA. This was a human and moral gesture, not a political one and it deserves support from citizens throughout the country.

Although the law-and-order situation in the Srebrenica region is good, returnees are understandably sensitive to the issue of security, and we are working with the entity authorities to establish and maintain more ethically balanced policing in the municipality.

When I returned to Srebrenica in May this year I found it little changed since my first visit in 2001. In the last six months the RS authorities have invested more than KM 40 million in infrastructure and public services in the area. I understand that additional funds will be envisaged for this purpose in the 2008 RS budget and that the municipal authorities will be involved in planning and identifying spending priorities.

The BiH Council of Ministers has also approved a KM 10 million spending package of measures for Srebrenica recovery including construction, reconstruction and infrastructure development, as well as business promotion and the improvement of public services in Srebrenica. This is a good package and we all want it implemented as quickly as possible.

The Federation has allocated more then KM 4 million for projects of sustainable return in the Srebrenica area and to support education.

The purpose of the conference organized by UNDP, international donors and the municipality on 3 July was to raise development funds for Srebrenica, which it did, and to improve coordination among donors and better align their activities with the municipality’s own priorities.

Small but still important first steps have been taken to expand Bosniak employment opportunities in public services and enterprises. This is positive but certainly more needs to be done.

Large numbers of new jobs will only be created if we attract private investment. This is why we organized a major investment conference for Srebrenica on 6 November. The conference demonstrated that investor interest exists. An American firm and a Slovene firm announced plans to invest in the municipality. Now municipal, entity and state authorities must work together, with the support of the international community, to translate this potential into more investment and more new jobs.

Despite an agreement signed by the BiH Federation and the RS earlier this year on improving access to health services, returnees to Srebrenica complain that they are still unable to get the full medical treatment and benefits to which they are entitled. This is also true of other social services, and is a major anomaly of welfare provision in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authorities in both entities must work on this as a matter of urgency.

The Dutch and American governments are working to establish radio and television coverage throughout the Srebrenica area, which will significantly reduce the sense of isolation experienced by residents in outlying districts. CISCO Systems will soon provide wireless broadband Internet access to the community, allowing schools and youth to establish better connection with the world.

All of these positive initiatives will only succeed if a constructive dialogue is maintained among all the members of the Srebrenica community. Dialogue requires courage and confidence. Dialogue and will be essential in the months ahead if we are to reach agreement on such issues as granting the Guber Spa water concession, bringing other business to the

region and providing a better ethnic balance in the police and other public services.

In my work over the last six months I have found that the people of Srebrenica, after all that they have been through and in the midst of continuing and real hardship, are capable of working together to build a better future.

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