Introductory Remarks by the High Representative, Carl Bildt at the International Round Table on Human Rights in BiH

In recent weeks, many Serbian families – some of them life-long residents of Sarajevo – have decided to leave the areas surrounding the city. They would rather face an uncertain future in unfamiliar territory than stay in their homes under Federation control. Their departure from the Sarajevo suburbs is a tragedy, and there is no doubt that it has damaged our efforts to establish a unified, multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Instead of accepting this setback as an inevitability, however, it is incumbent upon us in the international community to redouble its efforts to find ways to calm the fears and anxieties of the local population.

Our job is clear – we must create a climate in which the population is confident that their rights will be respected regardless of where they choose to live. Only with this confidence will the people of Sarajevo have true freedom of choice.

The situation in Sarajevo brings into clear focus the difficulties that lie ahead for the people throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina as the sides strive to reconstruct the social fabric and begin the process of national reconciliation. The conflict in Bosnia has witnessed some of the most flagrant violations of basic human rights in recent history – certainly the worst we have seen in Europe in decades. And although the

war has officially ended, the fear and anger that characterized this conflict still simmer beneath the surface at all levels of Bosnian society.

At the same time, I see among the populace signs of hope and a belief that the war may indeed be over. For the first time in too many years, the pace of daily life is slowly returning to normal. Throughout the country – from Banja Luka to Gorazde, Sarajevo to Gornji Vakuf – ordinary people are now able to walk the streets and conduct the daily routines that we all take for granted, but which have been denied to the people of Bosnia for four long years. This hope is fragile, but with steady progress and the commitment of Bosnia's leaders to the process of national reconciliation, peace will be able to take root and flourish.

It is against this backdrop that the International Community must do its work to ensure respect for basic human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout all of Bosnia. To be succesful, our efforts will require the concerted and sustained interest and cooperation of the entire international community.

The Parties have committed themselves in word and deed to the highest standards of human rights. Our challenge is to see that this pledge is transformed into a reality for ordinary Bosnians. To do this, we in the international community must ensure that the formal institutions created as part of the Dayton Agreement as well as the informal structures to address human rights are put in place as quickly as possible.

Our strategy must be coordinated and our energy directed – any other approach will serve only to undermine our efforts and limit the likelihood of success. I have accepted primary responsibility for coordination of the human rights aspects of civilian implementation, and as such will see this process through to its completion. We have made progress in the past few months, but much remains to be done.

I have been impressed by the efforts of the various organizations involved in human rights implementation. I am especially pleased that the Ombudsperson has arrived in Sarajevo, and that the Council of Europe and the Parties have nominated candidates to serve on the Human Rights Chamber. In my view, the Human Rights Commission will be the cornerstone of our long-term human rights effort in Bosnia, and as such this institution deserves the long-term commitment and support of the international community.

Another central component of civilian implementation will be to create conditions conducive for the return of displaced persons and refugees and for the holding of free and fair elections. In this regard, a core aspect of the human rights strategy is developing effective monitoring mechanisms, which will be a prerequisite for any accurate assessment of the human rights situation. The primary organizations involved in this monitoring effort – the International Police Task Force, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union Monitoring Mission, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina – are on their way to fulfilling this objective.

At the London Peace Implementation Conference, I was asked to establish a Human Rights Task Force to coordinate the activities of the various organizations involved in human rights implementation. With the active participation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organization alike, the Task Force has been very successful in bringing together the relevant actors and facilitating the exchange of information.

In the first Task Force meeting, there was agreement that the High Representative should establish an evaluation unit as a way to coordinate daily human rights monitoring activities and to collect comprehensive information on the human rights situation throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. To fulfil this objective, I have established a Human Rights Coordination Centre which will be located in Sarajevo within the Office of

the High Representative.

Consultations are now underway with the primary intergovernmental human rights implementation organizations, including the International Criminal Tribunal, to formalize their participation in and cooperation with the Centre. In recognition of the valuable contribution that groups in the country itself and non-governmental organizations can make to our understanding of human rights trends, the staff of the Centre will establish working relationships with these two important communities.

As the only international mechanism that will have access to comprehensive information on the human rights situation, my expectation is that the Human Rights Coordination Centre will play a number of important roles.

First, it will play an active coordination role – with the capability to respond quickly to crises if and when they arise.

Second, it will support the efforts of setting up the permanent institutions that will safeguard human rights in Bosnia, and primarily the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Human Rights Chamber.

Third, he Centre will also be my main instrument in preparing the periodic assessment I intend to do of the human rights picture and the level of compliance with the provisions of Annex 6 of the Dayton Agreement. The first such assessment will be presented t the Peace Implementation Review Conference that will be held in Rome June 13.

Ultimately, however, reconciliation will not be complete unless the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are able to come to terms with the past. While the responsibility of the international community should be first and foremost to the living, an accounting of the past will be the foundation upon which a stable future can be built – impunity must fall to

rule of law.

Those responsible for war crimes must be held accountable for their actions because the cycle of hatred and violence cannot be broken unless there is a belief that justice has prevailed. The work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia is, therefore, crucial not only for those who were the victims of these crimes, but also to help the people of Bosnia take these first tentative steps toward the future.

Given the recent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, compliance with the human rights standards agreed to at Dayton presents a formidable challenge. There will be inevitable setbacks along the way. However, the momentum toward peace is undeniable and our efforts to consolidate these gains will continue unabated. I hope in our discussion today, we will acknowledge the difficulties we face as we move toward this goal, and search for solutions that are both effective and realistic.

Ultimately, proof of our eventual success – or failure – will be measured by the actions of both the political leadership and the Bosnian people in the coming weeks and months. It is my most sincere hope that the language of war will soon be transformed into a clear message of peace, and that all sides will take concrete steps to ensure basic human rights standards and fundamental freedoms for all persons within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I am convinced that this objective can be achieved and that the process of national reconciliation can and should begin in earnest. If we are successful in convincing the people of Bosnia that their basic human rights will be respected, those who have left Sarajevo may begin to belive they can return to their homes and begin the process of rebuilding a unified and peaceful city and nation. Thank you.