

Joint Press Statement On Brcko Bus Incident

Yesterday two buses carrying a delegation of Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs from the SD P led by Mr Zlatko Lagumdzija traveled to Brcko to visit the office of the Deputy High Representative for Brcko Ambassador Bill Farrand. The group was also accompanied by a delegation from Sweden. On their return from Ambassador Farrand's office their buses were stoned by a hostile crowd of Brcko residents. A number of the people on the bus suffered minor injuries including Mr Lagumdzija who was cut on the chin by broken glass.

The Principals, the OHR, OSCE, SFOR the UNIPTF and the UNHCR, utterly condemn this unwarranted and violent assault on the delegation and on their right to freedom of movement.

From the initial reports it would seem that the attack was orchestrated and that the local police who were on the scene failed in their duty to prevent the incident and stood by passively whilst it took place. Given that all involved knew well in advance that the visit was due to take place and that the visitors were exercising their legitimate right to freedom of movement in a calm and unprovocative way this apparent dereliction of duty is even more inexcusable.

The UNIPTF will submit a full report on the incident today to the Deputy High Representative for Brcko. As the Brcko Supervisor, Ambassador Farrand has the authority to demand that disciplinary action is taken against any police officers who failed in their duties including the power to remove them from office. If the UNIPTF report confirms that the local policemen did indeed fail in their duty he will exercise this right and those concerned will be required to face the consequences of their actions.

Additionally the UNIPTF will require the local police to carry out their own investigation into the incident to identify the stone throwers and bring the necessary and appropriate prosecutions.

The Principals remind the authorities that freedom of movement is a core element in the implementation of the Award of the Arbitral Tribunal for Brcko. Any failure of these authorities to comply with their obligations in this respect may have an impact on the final decision which the Tribunal for Brcko intends to take in March 1998.