Joint Statement of the OHR, IFOR, UNHCR and UN IPTF on Returns to Jusici

After nearly two weeks of intensive efforts by the Office of the High Representative, IFOR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN International Police Task Force (UN IPTF) to stabilize the security situation in Jusici and to facilitate safe returns to the area, we are pleased to announce today that significant progress has been made toward achieving that aim.

Working closely together with the citizens of Jusici and the Federation and Republika Srpska authorities, we have jointly developed procedures to enable the safe and orderly return of individuals to their homes in the Zone of Separation (ZOS). Like those procedures established on 3 July in Bijeljina and 5 September in Modrica for reconstruction of houses in the ZOS, they are designed to make this process as efficient and secure as possible.

Under the procedures for returns to Jusici, Federation authorities will facilitate the agreed departure of villagers remaining there for 72 hours, which began at 17.00 hrs today. During this time, IFOR and UN IPTF will secure the village, and three community representatives will be allowed to remain with the IFOR command there. Others will be able to visit during daylight hours. An international commission composed of OHR, UN IPTF, IFOR and chaired by UNHCR will immediately begin processing the applications of those individuals wishing to return to Jusici, and will aim to approve at least 50 % of these within the 72 hour period. Representatives of both entities have been invited to observe and advise in this process.

All approved applicants will be able to permanently return to Jusici immediately after the 72 hour period. Individuals whose applications are still pending will be able to visit the village during daylight hours to repair their homes until approval is granted. Federation and Republika Srpska authorities will cooperate with the international commission to obtain speedy verification of necessary property documents proving right to ownership.

Returns to Jusici, like those currently in progress in Brcko and Mahala, are a high priority, for they represent vital first steps toward larger-scale resettlement in the Zone of Separation and across entity lines in the future. The procedures that have been established to facilitate safe returns in the Zone of Separation will help further this goal. We will continue our efforts to implement similar initiatives in the weeks and months ahead.