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PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Posavina Officials Discuss Housing Solutions
On 10 July, Posavina Canton authorities, OHR, UNHCR, OSCE, and UN IPTF met to discuss housing problems in the Canton following reports of moves by the authorities to evict Bosniak displaced persons currently living in Orasje (Fed). At the meeting, Cantonal authorities pledged not to evict people without first providing them with alternative accommodation. UNHCR will also help find solutions to the housing problem in the Canton. OHR informed Canton officials that draft Posavina Canton housing legislation on the use of abandoned property may deprive many individuals of their housing and property rights. OHR is working with the authorities of both Entities on amendments to their property laws.

RIGHT TO RETURN

Serb Returns to Drvar Progressing
As of last week, approximately 50 Serb displaced *"heads of households"* had registered with the authorities in Drvar (Fed) as a part of an UNHCR programme for returns to the municipality. A number of Serb families have started to stay overnight to conduct repairs to their houses, and freedom of movement has reportedly improved. Though the majority of these potential returnees have not experienced any problems, on 2 July, two Serb returnees were arrested in the village of Bastasi after they were involved in a fight with a Croat man who assaulted one of them and threatened them both with a rifle. One of the Serb men was released the next day, and the other was sentenced to 20 days in Mostar prison for disturbing peace and public order for hitting the Croat man's car with a pitchfork. On 6 July, OSCE and OHR representatives met with the Cantonal President about possible irregularities in the trial. International officials have also raised their concern that two Croats involved in the incident and who were

reportedly charged with assault were released the same day.

Stolac Returns Delayed Again

International human rights monitors reported that returns of Bosniaks participating in the Stolac (Fed) pilot project temporarily stopped last week following the local authorities' refusal to allow a number of families to return because of questions about their rights to the properties. UNHCR plans to meet with the Mayor of Stolac this week to get the project back on track. Sixteen Bosniak families have been able to return to Stolac since the re-activation of the project on 23 June, which aims for the return of 32 of 68 families by the end of June. Implementation of the project has been blocked by the Stolac authorities since last year.

Prospects for Return to Konjic Discussed

On 14 July, human rights monitors met with the Mayor of Konjic (Fed) to discuss minority returns there in view of the municipality's recognition as an UNHCR "Open City" on 1 July. The Mayor stressed that Konjic embraces the "Open Cities" concept, but will face housing shortages when the refugees return. He also said that Konjic will encourage citizens' involvement in the protection of minority rights by establishing a "community watch" system for minority returnees. Monitors note that while the Konjic authorities seem genuinely committed to allowing minority returns, recent returnees are experiencing difficulties in regaining access to private property that is currently occupied. The UNHCR "Open Cities" initiative aims to encourage cities and municipalities where reconciliation between ethnic communities is possible to publicly declare their willingness to allow minority groups to return to their homes. Where such willingness has been demonstrated by actual returns, the community will be supported with international assistance. The U.S. government has allocated $5 million for "Open City" support projects that will benefit some 10 municipalities. Konjic, Busovaca and Vogosca have been recognised as "Open Cities" and UNHCR and its partners are currently assessing the potential of a number

of other municipalities, including 25 that have been put forth by the Federation authorities, Kresovo municipality (proposed by BiH Presidency member Zubak) and two RS municipalities.

INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Journalists Meet in Bihac OSCE brought together more than 50 journalists from throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina for an inter-entity journalists conference in Bihac on 11-12 July. Participants discussed media coverage of minority issues and the non-governmental organization "Search for Common Ground" conducted a workshop on conflict resolution. OSCE reports that the conflict resolution workshop and a workshop on writing grant proposals were particularly popular among the participants. The next in the series of inter-entity journalists conferences will be held just prior to the municipal elections.

Media and Human Rights Conference Held

Media Plan has published its report from the seminar on media and human rights that it organized in Banja Luka on 20-21 June, which was attended by a large number of participants from both entities. The seminar, organized by Media Plan's Sarajevo and Banja Luka offices, was sponsored by the Council of Europe. On the first day, international and Bosnian experts lectured about media rights and freedoms in the country. In a workshop held the following day, participants discussed a paper analyzing the media situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with special reference to human rights and media. Participants also discussed the recent confiscation of Polikita from newsstands in Sarajevo and exchanged views about legislation regulating the media in both entities.

MEC Chief Addresses Sarajevo and Doboj Police

On 2 July, OSCE members of the Media Experts Commission (MEC) gave a talk on media rights and on the Provisional Election Commission (PEC) Rules and Regulations to a group of senior police and ministry officials at the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of the Interior, as the final step in closing the MEC case on the confiscation of the satirical magazine Polikita from

newsstands in Sarajevo last month. All copies of the paper have since been returned to the vendors. At the meeting, the Cantonal Deputy Interior Minister instructed police and ministry officials to cooperate with the OSCE by observing the PEC Rules and Regulations regarding media freedoms. On 3 July, the MEC Chairman gave a similar presentation to the Doboj Deputy Chief of Police and his staff in connection the detention of a Danish television team last month. At this meeting, Doboj officials noted that they had not received instructions from the RS Ministry of Interior on the rights of journalists to travel to RS without "RS visas." Doboj officials also said that they would ask the Ministry to what extent they should obey PEC Rules and Regulations when they contradict RS laws. OSCE will clarify this issue with the RS Ministry of Interior, as PEC Rules and Regulations, drawn from Annex 3 of the Peace Agreement, clearly predominate in this case.

NOTE: *The HR Report is based on the most recent information available to the OHR from inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. Questions on specific items should be directed to the reporting organisation or to the HRCC. Please send information for inclusion in the report to 387-71-447-420, attention Leah Melnick (leah.melnick@ohr.int), Kristina Koch (kristina.koch@ohr.int), or Vladimir Stanisic(vladimir.stanisic@ohr.int).*

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