OHR Reconstruction and Return

RRTF: Report December 1997

Outlook for 1998

"Resources, repatriation and minority return"

December 1997

1. Foreword

1997 has been a year of mixed results for repatriation and return to Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the positive side, more than 100,000 refugees have returned from abroad; breakthroughs in minority returns have occurred in the Central Bosnia Canton and elsewhere in the Federation; a number of Republika Srpska municipalities are opening up to minority returns; and the economic situation is improving in most of Bosnia and Herzegovina (with considerable regional variation). On a more sombre note, the past year has illustrated the political and economic nature of the return problem. Obstructionism on the part of local authorities will not whither with the passage of time alone, even with successive rounds of elections. Nor will refugees return from Western Europe and elsewhere in significant numbers without an economic pull (jobs, housing, social services) and direct support. An integrated approach to Annex 7 implementation remains essential.

As the year draws to a close, the following has become clear:

- overall returns must accelerate in 1998; each year delayed is a victory for segregation and controlled markets in which people cannot move to where their skills are needed. International assistance is expected to reach its peak in 1998, and decline thereafter. The

international police and military presence is also likely to be scaled back over the course of the next year. This puts the onus on the parties to optimise returns while resources exist to support them;

- a strict focus on key political and economic determinants of return must be maintained; the complexity of the return problem must not be allowed to obscure the clear political and economic requirements for successful repatriation and minority return;
- targeted political interventions need to be used more frequently and strategically to broker minority returns;
- an economic pull effect must be created to entice refugees residing abroad to go home and take a chance of making a future there.

For the RRTF, this implies a course correction and restructuring in the new year. The following chapters outline the RRTF's strategy, revised structure, and substantive policy recommendations for how to apply these lessons and make 1998 a year of substantial repatriation and minority return. The economic, statistical and policy annexes provide more detailed discussions on topics raised and conclusions drawn in the main report.

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Office of the High Representative Reconstruction and Return Task Force