OHR RRTF Report December 1997 – Annex 3

RRTF: Report December 1997

Annex 3

A secure environment for return

December 1997

De-mining

Throughout 1997, the de-mining effort in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been marred by sub-optimal delivery and competing programmes. This has not been helpful towards serving the needs of returnees to have their villages de-mined. Even in the best of circumstances, available capacities will not suffice to address the large-scale contamination of the country with mines and unexploded ordnance. Still one million mines in over 30.000 suspected mined areas obstruct the return to normal life. Reconstruction projects have been delayed; returnees could not reach their homes. Fifty people per month are killed or maimed in mine incidents.

The United Nations currently orchestrate the de-mining effort through the UN Mine Action Centre. Its responsibilities will be handed over to the Bosnia and Herzegovina De-Mining Commission on 1 January 1998. In 1997, some well-funded independent de-mining initiatives were undertaken beside the UN effort that concentrated on the creation of local de-mining teams. The use of commercial private de-mining companies, however, is costly. Nevertheless, such companies were, in many cases, the only capacity available to implementers of housing and infrastructure projects. In the Zone of Separation, an

area with a higher concentration of mines due to the location of former front-lines within it, de-mining was impeded by mutual mistrust towards de-mining teams perceived as serving only one ethnic group.

A new Bosnia and Herzegovina de-mining structure for post 1 January 1998 has been designed by a Board of Donors: this body represents all the key de-mining donors and is co-chaired by the United Nations and OHR. The proposal was agreed by the Bosnia and Herzegovina De-Mining Commission and as a result of this consensus, a Memorandum of Understanding and "Agreed Principles" on the structure was signed by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers on 20 October 1997. The unanimous support of donors and the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities for this structure paved the way to put new structures in place for the post-1997 era. A De-Mining Commission, overseen by a Board of Donors, will aim to provide efficiency and transparency to the country-wide de-mining effort post UN control. The structure is also designed to welcome donors who wish to follow up their own projects outside the national effort. A Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC) will carry out the functions previously performed by UNMAC. Responsibility for de-mining operations, acting in co-operation with local governments, World Bank Implementation Units (PIUs), bilateral donors and the Board of Donors rests with the Entity Governments. The Board of Donors is pressuring the Bosnia and Herzegovina and Entity Governments to ensure that all the legislation and agreements for the new bodies are established by 1 January 1998 and that they are operationally effective as Bosnia and Herzegovina de-mining gathers momentum in the spring if not earlier. The United Nations have made the appropriate contractual arrangements to ensure that coverage is maintained until the new structure is fully into place and technical advisors will remain after the transition to support the Bosnia and Herzegovina de-mining effort.

The above-mentioned De-Mining Commission and Mine Action Centres will be supported by the UNDP-lead Bosnia De-Mining Programme for which an appeal to the amount of nearly 20 million US dollars has been made. This programme will concentrate on mine information and minefield marking (currently about half of the presumed minefields have been surveyed for the data base), mine awareness programmes, de-mining and ordnance clearance.

There has been rapid progress over the last three months in creating a suitable structure as envisaged by the December 1996 London Peace Implementation Conference. The Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities now have the chance to establish a structure which will meet the de-mining needs of 1998 and prove that the structure is worthy of sustained donor interest. The ensuing months will reveal whether they have met this challenge.

In the interim, UNHCR is recommending that donors funding housing and social infrastructure projects in mine-contaminated areas include means for de-mining activities in their overall project costs. The employment of commercial or other available de-mining teams, working to humanitarian standards, will be an expensive option, but one that will temporarily be needed until the above-mentioned structure deploys sufficient teams and prioritises its work according to the needs of returning inhabitants.

Police issues and SFOR

Wherever return movements into areas dominated by another ethnic group and visits of displaced persons to their homes in such areas were conducted successfully during 1997, the co-operation of the local police force was essential. Security arrangements had to be made through international actors in preparation for such steps. The close co-operation of the OHR, UNHCR, UN IPTF and SFOR with local authorities was a key element. Furthermore, assessment visits, in many cases, could

be arranged in a more relaxed political environment than at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, forceful intervention was sometimes needed, such as in the provision of area security by SFOR during reinstatements in Jajce or return movements to Martin Brod in summer and autumn.

Restructuring and training of police officers proved of essential value for the creation of security conditions allowing for return. The vetting of police personnel by UN IPTF both in the Federation and, after some delay, also on the Republika Srpska as well as a robust strategy on the removal of illegal police checkpoints, arms inspections in police stations and action against special police units (that were declared armed forces to be treated under Annex 1 A of the GFAP), exercised by SFOR in joint operations with UN IPTF, were crucial to improve the overall climate. The restructuring of the special police forces, led by SFOR, aims to disarm, vet and transfer special police officers into the normal police forces. They will be included into the UN IPTF police restructuring programme. In September, the Republika Srpska agreed to join this programme and has, since then, participated with active interest on the part of the police corps. During 1998, the restructuring of the police forces will continue, with an emphasis on training police officers in human rights and democratic policing principles. Furthermore, foreseen quotas for police officers not belonging to the ethnic majority of the police precinct will be pursued as part of the re-structuring of both Entities' forces. This will support the return process, providing additional comfort to returnees through the presence of police officers from various ethnic groups, some of whom will also have returned to duty in the area of return.

Freedom of movement noticeably improved, but is still far from perfect, with UNHCR buses and taxis waiting at pick-up points still being the only public means of transport across the IEBL. The change from an era just after the war, when 70% of

human rights' violations were committed by police officers, to an environment where police forces will actively ensure the safe return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin, has still to be completed.

In the Central Bosnia Canton, joint efforts of international actors together with Federation and Canton government officials were directed at establishing the joint Cantonal police force in parallel to drawing up a cantonal return programme. The Federation meetings of 5 and 27 August, 14 October and 2 December reflect the progress achieved in this field. By the end of 1997, a joint Cantonal police force is operational in the Central Bosnia Canton and another has been established in the Neretva Herzegovina Canton. Police reform is also ongoing throughout both Entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The misery of groups of displaced persons, still often living in very difficult conditions and without prospects for a gainful living for years, is also of relevance to the security environment. Frustrated and frightened by the uncertainty of their future, groups of displaced persons are sometimes manipulated into aggressive action against the return of original inhabitants. Their plight will have to be addressed by providing them with viable options to improve their life as well as better and more balanced information, through an improved local press and mass-media. Their lack of information is sometimes at the heart of deliberate manipulation by political forces opposed to the return of refugees and displaced persons.

Area security provided by a credible SFOR presence will have to be available also in 1998. General patrolling activities, in co-ordination with local police forces and UN IPTF, will be needed to provide, on occasions, the needed deterrence to elements who would wish to impede phased and orderly return movements. In view of the need to concentrate, in 1998, on minority returns in order to free sufficient housing space

also for repatriating refugees, sufficient ground deployment of SFOR assets will be crucial. Over-the-horizon disposition of troops would deprive the international peace implementation effort of a necessary instrument of support to return. Furthermore, standard operating procedures, allowing for general area security with low-level escalation potential and force-protection rules including well-established local civilian-military relationships, will remain essential.

Creating a sustainable security environment will, however, continue to be the main responsibility of local police forces and depend on appropriate local government efforts. The restructuring process as well as local police officers' awareness of the need to adapt their own working procedures to the demands of return, will be key to sustainable return in a still potentially hostile environment.

Back to Index

Office of the High Representative Reconstruction and Return Task Force