Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

	Spokesperson	Topic
OHR	Avis Benes	o Agenda for HR's visit to C7 o OHR (S) calls on FBIH Ministry for Social Welfare to disclose information regarding reconstruction program in the Mostar region o HoOHR(S) meeting with WDC La Strada, the NGO fighting against trafficking of women
OSCE	Richard Medic	o Media advisory of inter-entity meeting of political parties o OSCE evaluation of current situation in Stolac municipality
SFOR	Maj. De Lambert	o No statement

Avis Benes – OHR

Please accept our apology for starting late. We wished to wait for some journalists who attended a media opportunity with the High Representative Paddy Ashdown after his meeting with Mayor of Mostar Hamdija Jahic. You have the opportunity to ask him everything you want as he is visiting Herzegovina today. There is another media opportunity in Citluk, after his meeting with the wine producers from the BH Association of Wine at 16.30 in Rudarska Street bb in Citluk. I believe you all received a media advisory but should you have any further questions

related to his visit please feel free to contact our office.

Today I have two things on behalf of the OHR.

My first statement regards OHR call on the Ministry of FBIH Social Welfare to disclose information regarding reconstruction programme in the Mostar region. The Office of the High Representative is very concerned about the performance of the Federation Ministry for Social Welfare in its reconstruction assistance program. The ministry made certain promises regarding the reconstruction of some 450 pre-war houses in the Mostar region, specifically in Canton 7 and Eastern RS. Beneficiaries were designated by the ministry, and UNHCR provisionally confirmed their eligibility for assistance. In order to be included in the Federation program, beneficiaries had to remove themselves from waiting lists for other programs. In addition, designated beneficiaries who occupied claimed property vacated their temporary residences and moved into buffer accommodation, anticipating the delivery of construction materials. Even though the Ministry gave assurances to designated beneficiaries, to date no assistance has been delivered, and no further information has been forthcoming. Despite requests from OHR to do so, the Federation Ministry for Social Welfare has yet to publicly disclose all information pertaining to the reconstruction program in the Mostar region. The ministry should particularly explain what has happened with the funds, 6 million KM, that were promised more than one year ago. The displaced persons who received assurances of support under the Federation program deserve to be informed of the current state of affairs. Their lives and livelihoods hang in the balance. The least that the citizens of BiH should expect from their elected officials is full transparency. Once again we call on the Federation Ministry to inform as to what is happening with this programme for reconstruction.

Another issue I would like to mention today regards the meeting that the Deputy High Representative and the Head of

the Office of the High Representative South, Jean-Pierre Bercot had on Monday, 5 August 2002 with National Coordinator of the Women Development Center – La Strada, Ms. Fadila Hadzic. Ms. Hadzic informed Ambassador Bercot about activities of this non-governmental humanitarian organization founded with the aim of protection of rights of women who are potential and actual victims of women trafficking. La Strada for BiH has its seat in Mostar and it makes a part of the network of organizations from 9 countries: Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Belarus and Macedonia. Beside effective help to women through preventive and educational work as well as social assistance and direct help to the victims, this organization seeks to publicize the issue of women trafficking and to influence change of legal regulations to adjust them to the highest standards of human rights. Ambassador Bercot found the work of this organization admirable and he expressed his and the OHR's full support to the work of La Strada. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the problem of women trafficking is indeed very serious and much more has to be done financially, legally and publicly in order to fully raise public awareness and help all the victims. The meeting was also attended by the IPTF Stop Team which presented the data on the issue. Ambassador Bercot was in particular appalled and shocked by the presented information on the number of public officials who support this shameful and criminal activities through their personal involvement. Posters you see here belong to this organization. For more information on the work of WDC La Strada please contact Ms. Fadila Hadzic, who is here today with us. I think this topic really deserves more attention of journalists and public in general and I hope you will approach it as such.

Richard Medic – OSCE

Two things from OSCE today.

First is a very short media advisory. Political Resource

CentreMostar in co-operation with Political Resource Centre Trebinje is hosting the third inter-entity meeting of political parties this Friday. The meeting will gather political party representatives from Canton 7 and southeastern Republika Srpska. Participants will focus on the theme economic regeneration. Journalists Pejo Gasparevic and Nebojska Kolak will moderate the discussion. The objectives of the inter-entity meetings are to open and strengthen dialogue, co-operation, and understanding between the parties. The meeting will take place in the Glass Room here at Hotel Ero, Mostar, on Friday, 9 August 2002. All media are cordially invited to attend a question and answer session after the meeting, at 13.00hrs.

Second thing I would like to say today is rather longer statement on the OSCE evaluation of the current situation in Stolac. OSCE, together with other international agencies, have been working in Stolac for a number of years. The early post-war period was marked by sometime violent confrontations carried out in a desolate, severely damaged/destroyed urban environment. Thousand of Serbs and Bosniak residents were displaced and moved elsewhere. Despite this situation progress has been made, though much remains to be done. Only one successful approach to the future of Stolac exists: Bosniak and Croat citizens and their leaders must work together to build a viable town – politically, socially, culturally and economically. Obstruction from anywhere within the municipality's population harms only Stolac's future. Common action has led to significant achievements:

* Property law implementation rate rose to 70.38% (higher than Federation average) as of 30 June; forecast to reach 100% before 31 December 2002. Over half of the Bosniak DPs have returned to Stolac and repossessed their property.

* The multi-ethnic Stolac Municipal Council passed its 2002 budget unanimously and on time.

* The multi-ethnic Stolac Municipal Election Commission is working effectively and very professionally.

* The current mayor is an active, practical problem solver who wants to improve his town.

* The Gimnazija director, who blocked the formation of a joint administration, further integration of classes and every other effort to create a mixed student body, no longer occupies that position. Real hope for the further normalization of education in Stolac now exists.

* OSCE selected Stolac for a special municipal development program because the municipality showed a willingness to reform. The above examples are drawn from OSCE's own working experience in Stolac. We have observed this past year more willingness on the part of parents to think of their children's future, rather than of their own past. These developments demonstrate that municipal structures in Stolac can function if local politicians show pragmatism and goodwill. For the hard problems remaining to be solved, it is, of course, the Municipal Council where course-setting decisions should be taken. OSCE urges the Bosniak councilors to end their boycott of this body, the Croat councilors not to use their majority for outvoting the minority on essential issues and both sides to seek co-operative compromises which will, ultimately, serve the whole municipality and all its citizens rather than one-sided ethnic interests .

Avis Benes – OHR

Thank you Richard. Let me say that the OHR fully supports OSCE's statement. Also we appeal on Bosniac councillors to take up their places in the Municipal Councils as soon as possible.

OHR's statement on the meeting with representatives of La Strada and contact information for Ms. Hadzic is available in

a written form. The first statement will be faxed to you in a form of the press release later on.

Today there is no special statement on behalf of SFOR but Maj. De Lambert is available for you questions. Any questions? No! Thank you.