Transcript of the Press Conference in Mostar

Avis Benes, OHR Spokesperson: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to a weekly press conference of International Organisations seated in Mostar.

Only two short things from the OHR. One of them is more of protocol nature, since tomorrow, 6th of June 2002, in Paris a special UNESCO gathering will be held and the theme of this gathering is the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, symbol of dialogue between the communities in BiH, and within the UN's Year of Cultural Heritage. The Head of our Office, Deputy High Representative Mr. Jean Pierre Berçot, as well as Mayor Jahic and his Deputy Mr. Tomic are in Paris, and they will take part in presenting the Old Bridge reconstruction project to the member countries. The main goal of this occasion is to present to the main UNESCO Council the progress achieved in reconstruction of Old Bridge, as well as with the rest of the Old Town and also to show the activities that will be taken in the future regarding this issue.

The second thing is also of a "lighter" nature, although many of you are already aware of it. I will just remind you that we have within the OHR this help line for journalists now and the programme is financed by the European Commission. If any of you need any stickers, telephone numbers to post them in your offices you can take them here.

That will be all on behalf of the OHR, and now I give the floor to Richard and the OSCE.

Richard Medic, OSCE Spokesperson: Good afternoon, I will say only two short things today.

First of all, the demobilization of approximately 10.000

soldiers is currently underway in the Federation. Issuing of payment packages for soldiers will start late this week, or early next week. A number of International Organizations, including the OSCE, are assisting the authorities in the demobilization process. The OSCE Mission is directly assisting the Federation Government in putting together a book which contains useful information for soldiers who are leaving the army, as well as for other citizens requiring similar information. This publication will include the information on training, employment, housing and credit programs, as well as Laws and regulations such as those related to establishing the small businesses.

This book will also contain the information on relevant official institutions at all levels of Government. The book is currently being printed and it will be launched into the Federation at the end of June. The Republika Srpska version is currently underway and it will be issued later this year.

And one more short thing. The OSCE would like to remind all citizens about the deadline for voters registrations for the coming elections, it will be on 20th June, that means in two weeks. Citizens are urged to check voters registration lists as soon as possible so they can, if necessary, amend their details at their local registration centers.

Thank you, that will be all on behalf of the OSCE.

Kirsten Haupt, UNMIBH: Good morning. Today I have two major items for you today.

UNMIBH notices with great concern that there continue to be return-related or ethnically motivated incidents in the area. I will give you some examples on that. For instance, on 22 May 2002, a Serb was harassed and insulted by two Bosniaks while travelling on a bus from Mostar to Pijesci. The two men were later identified by the local Police and will becharged accordingly. On 27 May, a Bosniak man was beaten up by two

Croats. They abducted him to an apartment where they continued to beat him. After first demanding a large payment, they ended up robbing the Bosniak of his car, hismobile phone and his cash.The investigation into this case is ongoing.

This is now the case that had happened in Ljubuski, but it fits in the overall picture. On 28 May, a Bosniak woman in Ljubuski was threatened by a Croat couple who is displaced from Konjic. On 29 May, a Serb returnee to Mostar West Municipality reported that she found a grenade in her newly repossessed apartment. Also on 29 May , a Bosniak man reported to the local Police in Capljina that his house he was about to repossess had been totally demolished. All fixtures, doors, windows, electrical water pump and water tank had been taken from the house. The previous illegal occupant, a Croat woman, offered payment for some of the missing items that she admitted to have removed from the house. The rough estimate of the damage amounts to 17.000 KM. Insults had also been written on the walls of the house. This case is being investigated by the Local Police. The last example goes back only a few days. On 02 June 2002 in Stolac, a Serb was beaten up and insulted by three men. Two men were later identified. The case is being investigated and followed up.

At the end I know UNMIBH and also other International Organizations are very concerned about these incidents, as they have a potentially detrimental effect on the overall situation, in particular in relation to returns. Some of these incidents may seem minor, but the continuity of such kind of incidents illustrates their seriousness. The fact that these incidents continue to take place clearly indicates that a lot more needs to be done to further promote a climate of ethnic tolerance and reconciliation. UNMIBH wants to use this occasion to call on the police to investigate these incidents vigorously and thoroughly. In particular we urge the police to file charges that are appropriate with the respective offence. In some instances we have found that violation charges were

filed in cases where the offence had warranted criminal charges. By conducting a thorough investigation and filing adequate charges to the courts, the local police will contribute to supporting the return process and demonstrate that the ethnically motivated crime would not be tolerated and severely punished.

The second thing is about the judiciary.

You may recall that the High Representative Paddy Ashdown, in his inaugural speech, put great emphasis on the Rule of Law, in particular an effective judicial system. Working with the Police, UNMIBH is dismayed to see that a slow and bureaucratic judiciary is often negating positive results of police work. For instance, the court proceedings regarding the Liska Street incident are still ongoing. The incident took place in 1997, a re-investigation took place in 1999. Criminal reports filed, witnesses were examined, but there is still no end in sight. Currently, the case is with the Supreme Court, who has to decide on the admission of vital documentation in this case. This means that five years after this incident, due to unnecessary and bureaucratic delays the criminal investigation of this case still remains inconclusive. These delays in the judicial processes, in this case as well as in many others, are of great concern to UNMIBH. They do not contribute to fostering the Rule of Law and do not create confidence in the justice system. But the Rule of Law is of vital importance to BIH in all spheres of life, from economic recovery to the overall return process.

Avis Benes, OHR Spokesperson: Thank you, Kirsten. The OHR shares the concerns of the UN and I would also like to remind that they are some incidents that have not been reported to the Police, because the citizens are in fear to report such incidents. So I would like to use this occasion to encourage them through the media to do that.

Ltc. Nicolas Rambaud, MND SE Spokesperson: Good morning ladies

and gentlemen, I have no statement for today but only a release and media opportunity.

After one year as Multinational Division South-East Commander, Major General Maurice AMARGER will end his mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and go back to France on Friday 7th June 2002.

He fully appreciated this country and its people and will ever remember the good relationships he had since the beginning with local inhabitants, civilian and military authorities. For the time he spent in BiH, he noticed that a lot of efforts have been made to move forward a better future.

Before he leaves, Major General AMARGER would like to wish all the best to you all and to your beautiful country.

Major General AMARGER successor is French Brigadier General Philippe SOMMAIRE. The transfer of authority ceremony is scheduled on Friday 7th June 2002, from 11.00 hours to 13.00 hours.

This ceremony will be chaired by SFOR Commander, General John B. SYLVESTER. Many local and international military and civilian authorities will attend Major General AMARGER's farewell ceremony.

All media are welcome to attend this ceremony. We need a response from the media representatives that are interested to come. Please notify us by mail or fax no later than Thursday 6th June 2002, 1700 hours. The meeting point will be in front of the MND-SE base Ortijes, at 1020, on Friday. I will accompany you directly to the right spot. Everything you need is written in a press release. Thank you.

QUESTIONS:

Mirsad Behram, RTV MO: I have two questions – one for the OHR,

one for the UN.

My question for the UN is the following one: two days ago, you could have read in Oslobodjenje newspaper the letter that was sent by displaced persons from Gacko who are currently residing in Sarajevo. This letter has been forwarded to the President of the City Assembly Gacko, RS. The letter reported on the reoccurrence of the same incident as you mentioned regarding the return process. Imam from Trebinje was as well complaining again about the reoccurrence of these incidents. Can you give us more details about it? Regarding the investigation about the last year's incidents that happened in Trebinje, is it over or still ongoing, what is happening with it?

Question for the OHR: Regarding the Central Zone area in Mostar and the construction of the Croat National Theatre there, the Mayor has filed a complaint against INTERINVEST company because they took off the official seal from the construction site. Can you comment – can you confirm or deny the information? Thank you.

Kirsten Haupt, UN Spokesperson: First on the situation in Trebinje area. When I looked through the last, let's say ten days or two weeks, to actually come up with the number of incidents that actually took place and had been reported to us, there was a part from the recent incidents involving the amount that was not reported, apart from the one regarding the Imam that I had reported. Of course, it does not mean that no incidents take place. Let's just be very clear about this. What I have talked about here are the incidents that have been reported to the Police, and we do know that incidents take place which are not being reported. When I was working in Trebinje before, we had occasions when we received complaints from the citizens and then actually approached the Police and told them about suchincidents,because the citizens did not want to report to the Police in one or the other situation. As I havesaid in my statement today, there continues to be a

number of, let's say, smaller and less smaller incidents. They are not that big or major, however there is a large or relatively large number of such incidents that continue to happen throughout. And especially if you look at that – I gave you the names, just within the small number of days so many incidents had happened. That indeed is the reason to raise concern. Regarding Gacko, I have not heard about any incidents, which does not mean that there are none. But I think that the letter sent by displaced persons, I think that it reflects exactly that concern regarding the continuous incidents that might be considered small, but their number is quite significant. It is difficult to say they are minor incidents, but there is some significance and that is why I brought this subject up today, there is so many of those incidents that they really do give reason to be concerned.

I am sure you understand what I just wanted to say, that and we need to continue to look at the situation because as you can see from what you just mention regarding the letter of displaced person from Gacko, they do have a negative effect on the return process and the overall situation.

And in that connection I can only repeat what I said earlier – to call on the Police to take these incidents seriously and to file appropriate charges. We certainly look up at those incidents and follow up and also contact the Police when we are of the opinion that the charges filed are not appropriate to the offence.

Regarding the Trebinje incident of last year, I have to say that the judicial process is still ongoing. You know that there have already been some trials last year, there were violation charges against ten people and criminal charges against five people were filed. Those trials have concluded and the sentences range from fines to short-term prison sentences. There are still appeals pending in all those cases. And the last case in front of the Basic Court in Trebinje on criminal charges against three people is still ongoing. That

is a short summary.

Avis Benes: I just want to give a short answer. We know, we have received the letter from Mayor Jahic, regarding this removal of official seal and the steps he will take. In any case, the OHR supports City Administration authority and of the newly-founded Commission for Revision of Illegal Construction in the Central Zone and we are of the view that this is the address, that this is the body, which is responsible and which has to take over the authority and deal with these cases. The very act of official seal removal is of no use to anyone, because the times when everything was realized by using force and with the "fait acomplit" policy, we hope, is far behind for all of us. You can also notice that the emphasis in the past and in the future period of time is put on the development of Rule of Law and judiciary system. We hope that this will have influence on the works performed by the Commission and in general on this whole problem regarding the illegalconstruction.

Vlatko Menix, HRTV MO: A question for Lt.C Rambaud. Can you tell us how far has the investigation regarding the 110 tones of explosive devices found in Mostar region come, and which stage the investigation is currently at at this point about the other mortar shells that you reported are missing. Could you tell us more about the alleged involvement of some politicians in this discovery?

Lt.C Rambaud: I can answer only to the second question, not the first nor the third one. As you know, political questions are not within the scope of my duty. The investigation is ongoing and we have to wait for its conclusions. Many reports have been made in the press and we have to follow them. We are waiting, as well as you are, for the results. As for the caches, we are still continuing to search for weapons and ammunition. Approximately twenty different sites have to be checked and searched. We are facing some problems because of some mined zones. And for some sites we have to check if they

are mined and it will probably last a long time.

Kirsten Haupt: Maybe I can say something on the first and the third question. I thought that I clarified earlier that this part of the investigation actually lies with the MOI, because this is a criminal investigation, as you probably already know. I have just one additional information regarding the ongoing investigation, but I am sure you know about it because it was today in the media. The sixth person has been interviewed currently / yesterday, and, as I understood, the interviewing is continuing with the person who was a manager of weapon/ammunition production in Jablanica. So this is the only new piece of information I can give you at this point, and you will understand as I said earlier that I can not speculate on any political implications. We have to treat this – in the first place this is a criminal investigation and we have to let the crime team members carry out this investigation, do their work and see what results they will come up with. So that is all I can say at this moment.

Miljenko Karacic, HRT: A question for Miss. Haupt. Do you have any knowledge that a part of the trial process against Naletilic/Martinovic, that is being carried out at The Hague Tribunal, will be handed over to Mostar Cantonal Court?

Kirsten Haupt: No. Sorry, I have no information on this case.

Miljenko Karacic, HRT: Bearing in mindwhat you said about the inefficiency of local judiciary system, will a part of the trial processes, the jurisdiction of which has been given over by The Hague Tribunal to Cantonal Courts, be continued at local Courts in BIH?

Kirsten Haupt: You know that this procedure was introduced a while ago to actually relieve The Hague Tribunal off the caseload. I mean, all war crime cases are first handed over to the ICTY, then they decide whether they take on the cases themselves or hand them back to the local authorities of the

respective country. I am afraid that we also have to expect very long trials on those cases, due to what I have said before – I mean a very slow judiciary processes that take place in this country. My comment is basically aimed at the fact that in order to have an effective Rule of Law one needs to have a good co-operation between the police or the law enforcement agencies and the judicial agencies. I think that we all understand that a lot has to be done to reform the judiciary. It is not for nothing that the HR has made this one of his priorities.

Avis Benes: Yes, but at the same time with the time we expect the Courts to improve their work as time goes by, so I believe that what has been agreed by the Hague Tribunal will not be given up.

Pejo Gasparevic, HINA: My question also goes to Miss. Haupt. A couple of days ago, the Federation Minister of Interior, Mr. Maslesa, talked imprecisely about money laundering. He mentioned and underlined it was about a trans-national chain of money laundering. Then he, quite illogically, mentioned one person of a specific nationality only – I am speaking about the arrest in Citluk. According to him it is about a citizen of the Republic of Croatia. Can you give us more detailed information about possible other individuals that are involved in this trans-national money laundering chain?

Kirsten Haupt: I wish I could. But I have no further information on that.

Tina Jelin, Studio 88: Kirsten, last week the Cantonal Ministry of Interior expressed their dissatisfaction with the poor co-operation with the Federation Ministries, especially regarding the exchange of and access to the documentation of the Federation to CantonalMinistries.Can you tell us if these documents have been forwarded to the Cantonal Ministries?

Kirsten Haupt: I already said last week that I would not

comment on this. That was in relation to the statement that was issued by the Minister of Interior, and I will not comment on these complaints. This is a part of the investigation into this case of the secret ammunition storages and the best place to actually inquire that would be the MOI itself.

Avis Benes: Any other questions? If not, thank you for your attention. Se you next week.