OHR’s Statement at the International Agencies’ Joint Press Conference in Banja Luka

Talks Must Continue As Soon As Possible<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

A window of opportunity still exists for agreement on police reform. Although many other issues are on the all parties have an enormous incentive to reach agreement.

Last December the Peace Implementation Council called for constructive talks among the political parties in order to facilitate the work of the Directorate and adoption of the Directorate’s proposals.

Two weeks ago talks seemed impossible, but political talks have started on the basis of the Directorate report and that is encouraging. It is also encouraging that there appear to be no objections to the timeline presented on 16 February.

The BiH leaders must reach an agreement on the report. Changes to the report are possible as long as they are in line with the three EU principles.

But without further talks progress becomes impossible. BiH could be in a position to progress towards its SAA as soon as mid-March. This is a golden opportunity for all in BiH.

A series of proposals have been made in the course of political talks, some of these are in line with the three EC principles; others are not. The only way to reach agreement is work

creatively to find common ground. The status quo has to change, but this country's political leaders must work out how.

This country needs police reform and it needs an SAA. If time is wasted, the opportunity of a signature of the SAA before the end of 2007 will be lost. There is no alternative to political negotiations.