

# Speech by Principal Deputy High Representative Donald Hays at the launch of the RMAP Consolidated Report

## *Rights-Based Municipal Assessment and Planning Project*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address you today. Over the course of the past three years I have spent a good deal of time visiting various municipalities all over BiH. I have listened to mayors and citizens and they have made it very plain – the current system fails to deliver adequate services to the citizens as a whole, much less to returnees or other disadvantaged groups. That is not to say that there aren't progressive mayors who work admirably for the people in their communities in the face of incompetent, indifferent or outright antagonistic government at other levels. But despite their efforts they cannot make up for the overall ineptitude in the present system. So while I take the side of those brave and committed mayors, I think we need to do much more if we are to promote the rights of citizens to equal access to services and to adequate services.

The recent passage of the amendment to the constitution and the implementing law that will allow for the citizens to play a concrete role in their own destiny and directly effect the selection of their mayors this year. This is a very exciting point in this country's political development but it will only make a difference if the citizens use this opportunity to break with the past and take full advantage of this right. On 2 October the citizens in municipalities across BiH will have an opportunity to choose for themselves the men and women who

will lead their communities for the next four years.

This change also marked the first time to my knowledge that the people actually brought about a change in the political landscape of this country. If this self-awareness, this creation of the empowerment of the citizenry continues it will have a profound effect on the delivery of services and the respect for individual citizen's rights. For the strength of any reform ultimately depends on those who demanded to be heard and brought about the reform.

However, while this very meaningful reform is important, if it is not followed by others, it will in and of itself create the preconditions to neither improve the quality of services to the citizens nor improve the operations of the municipalities. I am in full agreement with those who say that a law or series of laws must be created that properly balance the responsibility and the resources between the municipalities and other levels of government. Today, mayors do not have sufficient resources to address the legitimate demands of citizens. The root causes of this dilemma are clear – too much government and too little governance. This country has an unresponsive bureaucracy and duplication of governmental layers and budgetary system that ensures that citizens cannot expect government to meaningfully address their needs. This has to change and change now if the citizens of this country are to acquire their due. Action must be taken to improve the quality of local government and to give it the resources to meet its part of the compact with its citizens – they are taxed in order for government to meet their civic responsibilities toward all the citizens, the powerful and the disadvantaged.

This country must change from the bottom up.

Throughout my discussions with the more pro-active and progressive mayors one common fact emerges time and again in answer to the fundamental question regarding why their

municipalities work and others don't – that is *trust*, confidence and *pride*.

If the citizens trust their mayor and believe that he/she is really working for the people and not following some predetermined political agenda, the citizens in turn will support their municipality and take great pride in their environment. But again to make this work, the mayors must have adequate resources and the citizens must be actively involved in setting the agenda.

Municipal government is in the business of delivering services, and how well they deliver services is the best way – pretty much the only way – of gauging their efficiency and effectiveness. Now that the citizens will be empowered to decide who takes office as mayor in their municipality they can focus on ensuring that democratically chosen mayors deliver better services to the people who put them in office.

In the end facts speak much, much louder than words. There are municipalities around the country that are demonstrating an exceptional ability to serve their citizens.

One impressive example of such a municipality is Gradacac. The mayor is liked, trusted and admired by the local community because he is open, transparent and delivers what he promises to make the environment and the people's lives better and better. To reiterate this here are some positive facts about Gradacac:

- There have been annual investments worth 15 million KM
- A new drinking water system has been installed
- 50 KM of asphalt roads built in the municipality
- All streets are well lit with new street lamps
- A Business Incubator was established in 1999 in a destroyed high school.

These initiatives are not the result of massive international intervention, but a great deal of local self-initiative, and a

significant contribution of funds raised by the citizens of Gradacac themselves.

Municipalities should compete every day to offer their residents the very best in terms of service. This is the kind of ethos that is reflected in efficiently maintained parks, punctual rubbish collection, civic buildings that are properly maintained and consequently a source of pride. Citizens should feel a sense of pride in where they are living and with pride comes the confidence and the desire to further improve things.

For this process to work properly, however, the role of political parties must be put in its proper place, giving citizens choices and not manipulating the situation in a manner that is detrimental to the welfare of the citizens. Government at all levels should be blind to ethnicity and political affiliation when providing services to citizens. It is clear that is not now the case throughout this country. All too often political parties or representatives use the power of the government or the financial purse strings to focus resources only on one group and undermine the interest of others. Political party pressures tend to label ethnic identity first and this country beginning with the mayors elected this October *must* put an end to this sort of failure of governance.

Today in Bosnia, you have every kind of municipality – very large, very small, very well run, and very badly run. Oddly enough, one complaint I hear all too often is that well run municipalities are penalized for their success. When a municipal administration is self-evidently capable of, for example, attracting investment and generating employment it can find itself passed over by government departments and international organizations, who focus their attention on political affiliation not needs. In the short term that must be very frustrating – but the long term benefits of well-run municipalities in terms of jobs, amenities, and quality of life far outweigh the benefits of remedial programmes. And

remedial programmes will never mask the shortcomings of a badly run municipality.

For many in BiH life is hard enough without the added loss of basic human rights and needs such as clean water, safe streets, decent health care and schools for children. RMAP is essential to the process of empowering the people of this country to advance their own claims, prevent discrimination and take this country forward. Only in this way can individuals be actively involved in development and have some say in shaping their own future.

Thank you.