Statement by the High Representative Carl Bildt following the Third Meeting of the Joint Interim Commission in Sarajevo

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BY CARL BILDT, HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

Following the Third Meeting of the Joint Interim Commission

Sarajevo, 16 March 1996

We have today reviewed the implementation of important parts of the Peace Agreement, as well as discussed further steps of co-operation between the parties represented on the Joint Interim Commission.
I have expressed my concern with the fact that neither the Federation nor the Republika Srpska representatives have amended their respective constitutions before March 14 as provided for in the Peace Agreement. The Parties have however informed me that they are now in the final stage of preparations for these changes, and that they will be considered by the Republika Srpska Assembly March 25 and by the Federation Assembly March 28. We have agreed that the procedures should be finished by 31 March.

We have reviewed co-operation in the different economic areas discussed in Banja Luka February 27.

The Republika Srpska government has notified us of technical problems with the immediate restoration of water supplies to Gorazde, and these will now be verified by international experts.

There has however been a constructive meeting on joint plans to restore the supply of electricity to Gorazde as well as other communities in the Drina valley from Visegrad to Foca, and work is now proceeding in order to make this possible. It was agreed to continue with joint efforts to restore the power system throughout the country. The transmission system between the Tuzla area, Banja Luka, Prijedor and Bihac was addressed specifically.

It was noted that work is proceeding on restoration of railroad services between Zvornik, Tuzla and Doboj.

We discussed the necessity of moving forward on the question of co-operation on the payment system and on the question of a joint customs regime. I have stressed the importance of both of these issues in order to facilitate international economic assistance as well as to the development of trade links.

A meeting will be the coming week between the governments of the Federation and the Republika Srpska with the technical assistance of the OHR and the IMF. I have stressed the importance of achieving a solution prior to the Ministerial Donor's Conference in Brussels April 12-13.

I have urged the Parties to nominate their arbitrators for the Brcko area well ahead of the time laid down in the Peace Agreement, and have suggested that this be done before April 14. We will return to this issue at the next meeting of the JIC.

I have again expressed my deep concern about the lack of progress on the release of prisoniers. According to the ICRC, a total of 219 registred prisoniers still remain behind bars, and have not been able to return to their families in spite of

the clear undertakings by the Parties in the Peace Agreement, as many as 61 have been declared by the detaining parties as being held on the basis of suspected war crimes. It is however disquieting that none of these detention cases has been endorsed by an order from the ICTY, nor has the latter been consulted about further judical proceedings.

I have therefore called on the parties to verify the legal basis on these detentions and to clarify the judicial situation of the prisoniers held by the parties for further investigation into alleged war crimes. I have stressed their obligation to proceed with the immediate and unconditional release and transfer of the remaining 158 prisoniers, as well as of those not reasonably suspected of war crimes.

In view of the importance we attach to compliance with the Peace Agreement, I will raise this issue at the meeting in Geneva March 19 as well as in Moscow March 22. We must not accept that a central part of the Peace Agreement is not respected.

I have again stressed the importance of full co-operation with the work of ICTY. In particular, I have urged the Parties to promptly supply the ICTY with the material for review in accordance with the "rules of the road" agreed in Rome February 18.

We have also reviewed the work of the Working Group on Missing Persons led by the ICRC, and expressed our full support for and co-operation with its work.

The next meetings of the Joint Interim Commission will take place in Banja Luka March 28 at the invitation of Prime Minister Kasagic and in Brussels April 11 at my invitation.