

Transcript of the International Agencies' Joint Press Conference

Kevin Sullivan, OHR

Mersiha Causevic-Podzic, OSCE

Jem Thomas, EUFOR

Sanela Bajrambasic, ICRC

OHR

BiH Presidency Starting to Speak and Function in a More Coherent Way

As you know, the High Representative and EUSR, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, has just completed his first meeting with the BiH Presidency.

The High Representative encouraged the members of the Presidency to speak and function in a more coherent way.

He noted the progress that BiH has made in particular the opening of SAA negotiations but noted also that there are still important issues to be resolved, in particular the need to enact a BiH Ombudsman Law. As you know, the Ombudsman's Office is a key safeguard for citizens' rights – enacting this Law is also one of the remaining CoE post-accession requirement for BiH..

High Representative to Meet ICTY Chief Prosecutor

This afternoon, the High Representative will meet ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte, here at the OHR. This will be the first meeting between the two since the High Representative took office. The High Representative and the Chief Prosecutor

will make short statements to the media following their meeting, at four o'clock this afternoon here at the OHR.

SDHR to Press for Progress in Education, Administration and Banking Supervision Reform

The Senior Deputy High Representative, Martin Ney, will pay a farewell visit to Banja Luka tomorrow. He will meet RS President, Dragan Cavic and the outgoing Prime Minister, Pero Bukejlovic. Ambassador Ney will also meet with the outgoing Ministers of Finance and Education, Svetlana Cenic and Snjezana Bozic, and with the RS Prime Minister designate, Milorad Dodik.

Among the topics Ambassador Ney will raise during these discussions are the need to make further, rapid progress on Public Administration Reform – so that public funds can be used more effectively and public services can be improved at the same time, the need to establish banking supervision in BiH at the state level – so as to further strengthen the banking sector and thus increase the funding that can be poured into job creation, and the urgent need to enact a BiH Higher Education Law, which will, among other things, make BiH degrees valid abroad.

Following his meetings with RS officials, Ambassador Ney will hold a press conference at 13:45 tomorrow at the OHR Banja Luka

OSCE

Special Envoy of the OSCE Belgian Chairmanship in visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Special Envoy of the OSCE Belgian Chairmanship, Senator Pierre Chevalier, arrived yesterday to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Senator Chevalier, early this morning, met with Minister of

Foreign Affairs, Mladen Ivanic. They discussed talks on constitutional changes, forthcoming elections and negotiations on Stabilization and Association Agreement. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectfully, will send the press release on more details.

After the meeting with Minister Ivanic, Senator met with Ambassador dr. Martin Ney, Senior Deputy High Representative. As already announced, Senator is right now travelling to Mostar where he will meet the Chairman of the Mostar City Assembly, Murat Coric, and Cantonal Prime Minister Miroslav Coric. The press opportunity will take place at 16:15 after the meeting with Prime Minister Coric, at the premises of Cantonal Government building.

Senator Chevalier's visit focuses on reaffirming the close cooperative partnership between the OSCE and the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on beginning of the 11th year of the Mission's extensive field presence in the country.

EUFOR

Visit of Carla del Ponte

Last night, Monday 6 February 2006, ICTY Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte met with COM EUFOR, Major-General Chiarini, at Camp Butmir. This morning, 7 February 2006, she met with COM NHQSa, Brigadier-General Weber. Subsequently she was briefed by representatives of the NATO/EUFOR/ICTY team responsible for coordination of efforts to apprehend Hague-Indicted Persons Indicted For War Crimes (PIFWCs).

During her meetings and briefings, Carla Del Ponte was appraised of the enhanced coordination mechanisms between EUFOR, NATO and ICTY and discussed the current activities ongoing and future efforts being planned to finally bring the remaining six Hague-indicted PIFWCs to justice.

ICRC

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Over 15,000 people still missing

The ICRC published the seventh edition of the *Book of Missing Persons on the Territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina* today as part of its ongoing efforts to tackle one of the most serious humanitarian issues in the country. The latest edition of the book, first published in 1996, contains the names of 15,275 persons still unaccounted for.

Under international humanitarian law, families have the right to learn the fate of their missing relatives and to recover and bury the remains of those who have died, which is an essential part of the grieving process. The obligation to provide the families with the information they need rests with the relevant authorities.

The book bears witness to the suffering of thousands of families in Bosnia-Herzegovina who, 10 years after the end of the war, are still waiting for news of their missing loved ones. Its main purpose is to provide data for all those engaged in the tracing process and to obtain further information that could be of use to them. It is also a reminder that efforts to ascertain the fate of the missing cannot be abandoned until each and every case has been resolved.

The book lists the names of the missing in alphabetical order and by place of disappearance. It provides separate lists of persons about whom no information has been obtained since they were reported missing by their families and of those whose deaths have been reported to the ICRC but whose remains have yet to be found. It can be consulted by the general public in the offices of the ICRC and of the Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Federal Commission on Missing Persons, the Republika Srpska Office for Tracing Detained and Missing Persons and government officials regularly provide information on the identification of human remains in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This enables the ICRC to update its lists of missing persons. DNA analyses and the collection of ante-mortem data have improved the identification process and thousands of families have now recovered the remains of their loved ones.

Since 1995 the ICRC has received 21,480 tracing requests. So far, 6,855 cases have been resolved, mainly through the exhumation and identification of remains. At the same time, more than 350 families have only recently (2005) reported missing relatives to the ICRC. "The sheer numbers show how difficult it is for families to bear the torment of uncertainty," said Marianne Gasser, head of the ICRC delegation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "It is crucial that the families of missing persons throughout the country be given answers rapidly. They have already waited too long and they cannot recover their peace of mind until they learn what has happened to their relatives. Anyone who can help is requested to come forward."

The ICRC will pursue its efforts to ascertain the fate of all those still unaccounted for and to support their families, in accordance with its mandate and the Dayton Peace Agreement.

The information contained in the *Book of Missing Persons* is available on the ICRC's website (www.icrc.org).

RTQs

Fedzad Forto, FENA:

A question for the ICRC. When can missing persons, who are definitely, one hundred percent surely dead, be legally declared dead? It is a very important question for their

families – can the family members of a missing person inherit property, formally get a divorce, get married again? What is their legal status?

ICRC:

That is a very good question because...well, we are talking about 22,000 missing persons and their families had many problems until the Law on Missing Persons was adopted. The Law was adopted at the end of 2004. I think Bosnia and Herzegovina is the first country to have adopted such a law. It was adopted by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina . However, there is a minor problem regarding that Law. The problem is that the Law is not yet in the phase of implementation. A Work Group has been formed within the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, which is working together with the ICRC to draft sub-laws in order to resolve the implementation of this Law.

The Law defines everything, starting from the method a missing person can be declared...that is, the status of the family of a missing person. So far if a person wished to exercise their rights they first had to declare their relative dead – unfortunately. However, now in accordance with the Law on Missing persons this is no longer the case. In conclusion, this Law allows the families of missing persons to still deem their missing relatives as missing persons.

Bosnia and herzegovina has signed an agreement with the Commission on missing persons to establish an Institute for Missing Persons. According to protocol the Institute was supposed to open at the beginning of this year. However, as you can assume, everything is still in the negotiation and agreement phase, but according the plan I have seen, by the middle of this year it should be known when the Institution, as part of the Institute for Missing Persons, will start working – meaning that the problem of protection of information and other formalities must be solved in order for the Institute to start functioning. All of this would in some

way help the families of missing persons, so that they can find out what their legal rights are exactly and how they can legally exercise their rights.

Thank you.