

Human Rights Task Force Sets 2000 Agenda

The Human Rights Task Force (HRTF), comprising the principals of the main international organizations operating in BiH (OHR, OSCE, UNHCR and UNMiBH), as well as the heads of other agencies, met on Tuesday, 25 January, to set priorities in the area of human rights for the year 2000.

The meeting, which was chaired by the High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, and attended by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Jiri Dienstbier, concluded that the main obstacle for the full realization of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains official obstruction. Such obstruction prevents the full implementation of peace, and the fulfillment of the obligations of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While the HRTF recognized the progress made in the four years since the Dayton Agreement – for instance, most serious physical security threats have now been eliminated – violations of human rights continue to make the life of ordinary citizens insecure and difficult.

The elimination of discrimination in all fields is a central goal in the year 2000. All Bosnia and Herzegovinans, regardless of their ethnicity, gender or political opinion, must be able to expect equal treatment by the authorities, be it the police, the judiciary or the administrative bodies.

The most pressing and immediate priorities identified were the implementation of property laws, and the elimination of discrimination in the areas of education, employment, pensions and utilities. All of these have impact on the possibilities of sustainable return and the lives of ordinary Bosnia and Herzegovinans. Concrete ways of making progress were discussed and agreed upon by the HRTF. Action will follow.

Wolfgang Petritsch stressed that the responsibility to protect and promote human rights rests with the state and its agents, the officials of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, building national structures and institutions that respect human rights and the rule of law continues to be a high priority. The independence of the judiciary and the professionalism of the local police are of paramount importance. Strengthening domestic human rights institutions, such as the Ombudsmen, as well as civil society, is vital for the sustainability of work that is already in progress.

The priorities and recommendations of the HRTF endorsed in the meeting are available at the Office of the High Representative and will be distributed widely.