

## Statements by the President of the Security Council

The President of the Security Council made three statements (S/PRST/1998/3, February 1998; S/PRST/1998/6, March 1998; S/PRST/1998/19, July 1998) noting that the Council, *inter alia*: welcomed the successful completion of UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES); underlined the importance of continued efforts by the government to ensure full participation by the Serb minority in the political life of the country, including through urgent funding of the Joint Council of Municipalities; called on the government to intensify its efforts to promote full reintegration of the region, in particular to resolve property issues and other problems which are hindering the return of refugees and displaced persons, to protect human rights, to address in full uncertainties about the implementation of the Amnesty Law, and to take measures to improve public confidence in the Croatian police; expressed concern at the government's lack of compliance with obligations concerning the return of refugees and displaced persons; noted with concern the increasing incidence of harassment and intimidation of the local Serb community in the Danube region and the failure of the government to apply the process of national reconciliation in an effective way at the local level; and noted that measures should include the creation of conditions to allow local Serbs to remain in the region, to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons and to address underlying practical and economic issues which inhibit returns. The statements called on the government to: (a) establish clear procedures for the documentation of refugees from Croatia; (b) issue an equitable plan for nationwide two-way returns; (c) implement fully and fairly its legislation on amnesty; (d) act promptly to pass equitable property and tenancy rights legislation which would encourage returns and stimulate additional international reconstruction assistance; (e) ensure fair employment benefit practices and equal economic opportunity; and (f) ensure the non-discriminatory application of the rule of law. The statements also expressed concern that ethnically-related incidents, evictions and housing intimidation cases had increased; called for full and prompt implementation of the nationwide programme for the return and accommodation of displaced persons, refugees and resettled persons; and, called on the government to improve police response to ethnically-related incidents, evictions and housing intimidation cases.

### FIELD OPERATIONS

Ms. Anne Burley, Head of Office, Ilica 207, Bldg. A, 10000 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia, Phone: (385-1) 378-0441; Fax: (385-1) 378-0174; e-mail: burley@un.org.

The OHCHR for Croatia was established in 1993, with headquarters in Zagreb, to support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur (SR) on the former Yugoslavia. The legal authority for the OHCHR presence is based on

annual resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights, extending the mandate of the SR and calling on the Secretary-General to support the SR by maintaining a field presence.

The office carries out activities both in support of the mandates of the SR and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. A human rights training programme for police, to be conducted under the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation, is being developed in consultation with the government.

The main activities carried out as of August 1998 included: providing weekly and monthly reports to the OHCHR on human rights developments; providing regular information and briefings to the SR and assisting with the drafting of reports to the Commission on Human Rights; liaising with the government, the OHCHR, and the UN human rights mechanisms; providing information to the government and to elements of civil society — notably non-governmental organizations — on aspects of the UN human rights programme; and organizing workshops and training sessions with NGOs, academic institutions and others.

### Reports of the Human Rights Field Operation

Public distribution of the periodic reports prepared by the Field Operation was discontinued in June 1998 on the basis that the reports contained confidential information. In 1998, five reports were made publicly available prior to that decision (30 January 1998; February 1998; April 1998; 30 April 1998; 29 May 1998).

The reports note that the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (the Region) was fully re-integrated into the Republic of Croatia on 15 January 1998 after being administered for two years by Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES).

Human rights concerns addressed in the reports included: problems encountered by returnees in terms of recovery of homes; the deteriorating social situation in Croatia caused by the sharp rise in the cost of living, low and frequently delayed salaries and pensions, high unemployment, a new value-added tax (VAT), and the ever-widening gap between a small and increasingly prosperous group and a larger indigent population; continuing problems related to the return process — both official and spontaneous — affecting Croatian Serbs, and difficulties attaining access to their occupied property in the face of mounting legal and financial obstacles; an increase in the level of harassment of Serbs in the Eastern Slavonia region — noting that, during a village carnival in Baranjsko Petrovo Selo, about 100 Croats gave fascist salutes, set Serb symbols on fire, and disrupted traffic; police misbehavior, including failure to protect residents from looting, and participation in the destruction of personal property and possession; the fact that there were some 400 civil and 130 criminal cases for defamation pending against journalists and publishers; continuing discrimination on the basis of ethnicity; evidence of