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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ISSUE

One year after the signature of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP), the human rights situation throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a cause for serious concern. None of the three ethnic communities have fully honoured commitments made under the agreement.

BACKGROUND

International authorities have strongly condemned human rights abuses in Bosnia. Among them are Mr. Van Thyn, Coordinator of the International Monitoring Group of the OSCE, Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn, Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, in her reports to the Commission, and the three ombudsmen of the Bosnian Federation in their first semi-annual report. At the London Peace Implementation Conference in December 1996, Bosnian authorities agreed to a one year action plan. The plan calls on the authorities to improve the country's human rights and good government record across the board.

The September national and Entity elections in Bosnia, although not flawless, marked the beginning of a new stage of democratization. However, problems with voter registration and electoral fraud will have to be addressed as we look to municipal elections scheduled for later in 1997.

An independent media still needs to be fostered in Bosnia. While the international community is providing significant assistance, Bosnian authorities themselves must do more, such as facilitating the licensing of independent television stations and allowing better access to material resources for the independent print media.

Progress in the arrest of indicted persons and their surrender to the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is still lacking, and the current situation is unacceptable. Bosnian authorities bear ultimate responsibility in this regard under the GFAP, a commitment they reconfirmed at the London Peace Implementation Conference. The international community has served notice that compliance with this aspect of the peace agreement will be linked to the financial assistance made available to the national and Entity governments in Bosnia.

In territories controlled by each of the three ethnic communities, serious restrictions on freedom of movement have occurred and continue to occur, especially at or near demarcation lines between the two Entities. Illegal police checkpoints continue; many travellers have had to pay unrealistic fines, and some have even been detained. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has tried to alleviate these difficulties by establishing inter-entity bus lines, but even these initiatives have been frequently thwarted by local authorities or individuals acting with impunity.

Only a very small number of the three million displaced persons and refugees have been