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Press Release

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SRSG welcomes start of lead-toxicity treatment for IDPs in Camp Osterode

PRISTINA – Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Kosovo (SRSG) Joachim Rucker today welcomed the commencement by the World Health Organisation (WHO) of specialized medical treatment for lead toxicity for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of the Roma-Ashkali-Egyptian (RAE) communities, former residents of lead-contaminated camps in Žitkovac/Zitkovc, Kablare/Kablar and Cesmin Lug/Llugë in northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. Their recent temporary relocation to the lead-safer environment of Camp Osterode has made this medical treatment possible.

“This has been a painful chapter in the lives of the IDPs concerned, whom circumstances connived to keep in extremely unhygienic and adverse living conditions in the camps. I congratulate the parents who took the difficult decision to cooperate in their temporary relocation to Osterode for the safety of their children who are particularly vulnerable to lead-induced health hazards,” the SRSG said.

“The chapter is not closed yet and we will continue to vigorously pursue the reconstruction of the Roma Mahala so that these people can return to their homes in safety and dignity. In the meantime, I call upon the few remaining residents of Cesmin Lug/Llugë camp to move to safer housing in Osterode where they can get better medical care and other amenities,” he added.

Recognizing the need for emergency relocation of the IDPs on medical grounds, in January this year UNMIK, working together with partner agencies UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, Norwegian Church Aid and other NGOs, provided safer housing and better living conditions in Camp Osterode. This interim facility is designed to accommodate the IDPs until they can move to their permanent homes in the Mitrovica/Mitrovicë Roma Mahala when its ongoing reconstruction is completed.

A total of 150 households/593 individuals have since moved to Camp Osterode and camps in Žitkovac/Zitkovc and Kablare/Kablar have now been closed. Some 34 households/148 individuals still remain in the Cesmin Lug/Llugë camp and efforts for their relocation are continuing. Residents of Camp Osterode have been provided with items in replacement of the contaminated household goods from the previous camps. Over the past two months, a number of job opportunities were also made available in the camp.

Most of the IDPs are displaced from the Roma Mahala that was destroyed during the conflict in 1999. Reconstruction of the Roma Mahala is proceeding on schedule. The first two apartment blocks are expected to be completed by the end of this construction season in November and tendering process for two other apartment buildings has been completed. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has commenced work on construction/reconstruction of private houses with grants from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR).