

SRSB and the Prime Minister launch the 2005 Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns

PRISTINA – SRSB Søren Jessen-Petersen and Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi today launched the 2005 Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns during the first meeting of the High Level Task Force on Returns. Among those present on the occasion were representatives of political parties, Contact Group members, Heads of UNMIK Pillars and representatives of international organizations and NGOs.

Addressing the meeting, the SRSB said, “The issue of returns is clearly a critical one for Kosovo – the priority standard of priority standards in some respects. My hope is that today’s launch of the Strategic Framework will help to energise the returns process and thereby lead to significant advances, not necessarily in the number of returnees, but to the quality of life for those that do come back, and for the quality of choice for those that are considering returning.”

Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi expressed the Government’s readiness to take responsibility for all citizens of Kosovo. “The Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns shows clearly the policy of the Government. It confirms Government’s position on returning all refugees in their properties. Furthermore, it confirms our readiness to offer financial help to the returnees. The matter of Communities and Returns shall be treated carefully in our future long term policies,” said the Prime Minister.

The Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns outlines the “road ahead” for the returns process, and is articulated around three main priority areas: the promotion of safety and freedom of movement; the creation of sustainable conditions for returns; and the enhancement of institutional support for returns.

The framework will be followed, in the coming months, by the formulation and implementation of specific activities to be included in a “Programme of Action on Communities and Returns”. This process will be based on inputs and consultation with all stake holders such as political parties, minority leaders, IDP representatives, donors, NGOs, UNMIK and the PISG.

Full text of the SRSB’s speech at the launch of the 2005 Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns is appended to this Press Release.

Speech by SRSG Søren Jessen-Petersen at the launch of the Strategic Framework on Communities and Returns, 19 July 2005

Prime Minister, Colleagues, Excellencies – Colleagues – welcome and my thanks to you for coming today.

I use the word colleagues advisedly. We are all here because we believe that the work of promoting returns is a collective and collegiate business. One where we must work together in order to make the process a success.

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

The issue of returns is clearly a critical one for Kosovo – the priority standard of priority standards in some respects. My hope is that today's launch of the Strategic Framework will help to energise the returns process and thereby lead to significant advances, not necessarily in the number of returnees, but to the quality of life for those that do come back, and for the quality of choice for those that are considering returning. For, as I've said before, numbers alone cannot tell the story of the success or otherwise of a returns policy; instead it must be measured by the quality and genuineness of the choice the IDPs are being offered when considering returning.

STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The standards process has allowed us to measure progress in these areas – notably, for instance, in respect of freedom of movement. Returnees themselves have also provided another measuring stick of success, by undertaking the first urban returns in Klina and now in Prishtina. But these successes, important as they are, serve to expose the remaining issues that need to be covered – property rights, for instance, and the sheer complexity of the existing system. And just as the standards process can be used to highlight successes, it can also be used to highlight the remaining legal and procedural impediments to the non-discriminatory access for all citizens to human, economic, social and political rights.

We in UNMIK are also alert to the possibility of deliberate blockage of the returns process by disgruntled individuals. We rely on the PISG, and all political parties, at all levels from the centre to the municipalities to act against such malcontents if and when they are identified, and to ensure that their servants act within the law. But UNMIK will be ready to act under the accountability policy if impediments to returns are not dealt with in a timely fashion. Our mandate demands nothing less.

IMPORTANCE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Given the difficulties in managing the process of return it is vital that the process is one which can garner wide agreement. This is where today's launch comes in. The launch of the framework is only the beginning of a process. The framework does not prescribe solutions to the problems in the returns process. Instead it describes the situation as PISG and UNMIK see it and acts as a broad statement of principles in terms of our approach to these problems. As such it is designed to spark a debate – a debate in which I hope we

will all participate fully so that the resulting action plan, which we anticipate being ready later this year, takes into account the full range of ideas from across the spectrum represented here today – as well as from IDP associations and other NGOs, donors, and partner agencies not with us at this meeting.

We evidently also need the support of minority representatives. The Working Group on Returns, between Prishtina and Belgrade, under the Chairmanship of UNHCR, has adopted a very constructive and productive approach. At the same time, part of the political leadership in Belgrade is adopting contradictory messages, criticising lack of progress on the one hand while, on the other, denying Kosovo Serbs the opportunity to be part of the process here.

Returns is a sensitive and emotional issue – that is inevitable. It is also, therefore, inevitable that there should be differences of opinion between the PISG and the international community over how to proceed on the issue. Returns is not only an emotional issue within Kosovo, it is a sensitive one outside as well. Returns will no doubt be a primary focus of the comprehensive review of progress on standards, conducted by Norwegian Ambassador Kai Eide, and is anyone a primary focus of most international attention on Kosovo.

All the more reason, therefore, for us to work together on the issue and to ensure that in the coming weeks and months we have concrete evidence for progress – in terms of the action plan arising from this framework, in terms of resulting policy, in terms of real projects, in terms of progress in the field of property rights, – ultimately what these are all about – in terms of returnees being presented with a genuine choice, and taking the decision to return to their homes, or may be not to return, out of their own choices.

Achieving this would, like the launch of the framework today, provide a strong signal to minority communities – and I am here of course talking not only of the Serb community, but of all the minority communities which have suffered displacement since 1999 – and it will send out strong signals to everyone outside Kosovo that we are serious and united in our commitment to the promotion of returns.

I therefore look forward to fruitful discussions today and to the work of the Task Force. It has always been the case that we need to work collectively in promoting and facilitating the return of Kosovo's displaced people. Now it is truer than ever.
