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Task Force on returns meets for the third time

PRISTINA – Today, the Task Force on Returns called for a concerted effort to make further progress on return of displaced persons in 2004. This was the third meeting of the Task Force on Returns, a high-level body in which the four pillars of the returns process – UNMIK, the PISG, KFOR and UNHCR – are represented at the highest levels.

In his opening remarks, SRSG Harri Holkeri who chairs the Task Force, emphasized the importance of the Task Force's work, noting that 2004 is not only a pivotal year for returns, but for Kosovo's future more generally.

“Kosovo's progress towards meeting standards, will be reviewed in mid-2005. All parties agree that return of displaced persons will be a key indicator of that progress” - he said.

Prime Minister Rexhepi also welcomed participants and emphasized that returns are a top priority of the Kosovo government. He described the PISG's actions to support the process of returns in 2003 noting that those actions had created a better climate of tolerance. The Prime Minister also expressed optimism about the prospects for returns in 2004. Noting that €7 million had been allocated for returns from the Kosovo budget, Prime Minister Rexhepi pledged further support in the coming year, and added that Municipalities, which support return should receive more support from the Kosovo Government funds in the future.

Task Force participants reviewed progress on returns in 2003 based on a report by UNHCR Chief of Mission Walter Irvine, and discussed additional steps to be taken within the 2004 Strategy for Sustainable Returns.

Milorad Todorovic, Inter-Ministerial Coordinator for Returns, gave an overview of the funding request that will be made next week to international donors, and called for greater support of the returns process in the coming year.