



26 May 2000

INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL SPEAKS ON RETURNS TO KOSOVO

The Interim Administrative Council, following its meeting today, issued the following statement:

Over the past few years, and especially since 1998, large numbers of Kosovars have found refuge in many European countries and elsewhere. On behalf of the people of Kosovo the Interim Administrative Council expresses its deep appreciation for the hospitality offered in these countries, and wishes to make special mention in this regard of Germany and Switzerland. The efforts made by all concerned - Governments, individual people, UNHCR and NGOs - will not be forgotten.

Since June last year many Kosovars have already returned from abroad and many more are still coming back. The Interim Administrative Council welcomes all of them and invites them to participate in the building of a prosperous, tolerant and peaceful society.

At the same time the Interim Administrative Council wishes to appeal to the authorities of the host countries concerned to make all possible efforts to ensure that the return process takes place in a phased, coordinated and humane manner. While reconstruction is under way, there is still a serious shortage of housing in Kosovo. Because of a lack of employment opportunities, many people are relying on social welfare and other assistance services which UNMIK and the Joint Administration are building up.

The Interim Administrative Council believes that returns proceeding on a voluntary basis are the best - and certainly most humanitarian - way to facilitate a smooth and sustainable reintegration process. It therefore appeals to all host countries to avoid forced returns to the maximum extent possible and to treat all returnees in a humane manner.

The Interim Administrative Council welcomes the decision of some host countries to allow young Kosovars in technical institutions to proceed with their formation. It would welcome host countries to be flexible with regard to Kosovars who have stayed there for many years.

The Interim Administrative Council expresses its appreciation for the invaluable support given by donor countries, the European Union, UNMIK and all other organizations which are assisting with reconstruction of Kosovo. It welcomes in particular programmes of host countries to facilitate a smooth reintegration process.

