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SRSG Inaugurates Victims Recovery and Identification Commission

PRISTINA---SRSG Bernard Kouchner today inaugurated the Victims Recovery and Identification Commission, which is to be the key organization charged with identifying missing persons who died during the recent conflict and in earlier and more recent civil unrest in Kosovo.

The 10-member Commission held its first monthly meeting today in the UNMIK Government Building. A regulation which will establish the VRIC officially was endorsed yesterday by the Interim Administrative Council.

While the lead agency in tracing the missing remains the International Committee of the Red Cross, the VRIC will identify and dispose of the remains of bodies of victims. It will collect precise information on the number and identity of victims. The VRIC will coordinate with the exhumation and investigation work by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which remains the lead agency establishing records on violations of humanitarian law in Kosovo.

"NGOs, forensic doctors, psychologists, social workers from all over the world have performed and continue to perform this formidable duty that the living owe to the dead," said Dr. Kouchner. "This is not a pleasant work, but it is essential. Without knowing what has happened to family members who have disappeared, without the possibility to commemorate the dead in a decent, dignified way, those who are in mourning cannot turn the page."

The VRIC will also collect and maintain data relating to the recovery, identification and disposition of remains. It will provide assistance to judicial authorities in addressing missing person issues.

The VRIC will issue death certificates and will prepare a regulation on the legal status of the families of victims and missing persons.

It will also provide families of victims with programs of social and psychological support.

The VRIC is requesting that families of missing persons participate actively in the identification of victims by filling out special forms with information on the missing. These are available at the OSCE or ICRC offices in municipalities.

The Commission, chaired by the Head of Civil Documents Albrecht Conze, is an independent body, composed of 10 local members representing all communities in Kosovo, who are recognized experts in the field of human rights and active in the issue of missing persons.

The VRIC will operate jointly with the OSCE, which will maintain the data base. The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, a Dutch NGO, will collect data from the field and interview witnesses and family members. Also collecting data for the VRIC will be the American Bar Association Central and Eastern European Law Initiative.

The VRIC owes special thanks to KFOR which made the commission possible with initiatives such as rebuilding the VRIC mortuary.