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KTC Discusses Kosovo Protection Corps

PRISTINA---The Kosovo Transitional Council today received a detailed briefing on the Kosovo Protection Corps, given by the co-heads of the department of Civil Security and Emergency Preparedness, Mr. Bislim Zyrapi and Mr. Roland Nilsson and the KPC Commander, General Agim Ceku.

Before the briefing on the KPC, SRSG Dr. Bernard Kouchner, described the joint UNMIK-KFOR operation to take over the Zvecan Lead Smelter on Monday morning. He said this action had become necessary in order to prevent a public health crisis because of the high level of lead pollution being caused by the plant.

Mr. Zyrapi explained that a regulation for the Department of Civil Security and Emergency Preparedness was being drafted, which would cover the overall coordination of matters related to emergency prevention and response services in Kosovo, the implementation and maintenance of the regulation under which the KPC was established last year, establishment, coordination and supervision of the municipal fire and rescue services and long term arrangements for a Kosovo humanitarian mine action programme in cooperation with the Mine Action Coordination Centre.

Mr. Nilsson said the basic elements of the emergency prevention and response system were the municipal fire brigade and the Kosovo Protection Corps. The KPC, he said, is intended to be the governmental emergency response organization, mainly targeting the consequences of natural disasters, forest fires and chemical accidents. In addition to this the KPC would have the capacity for humanitarian assistance and for support to rebuilding infrastructure and communities. So far the KPC had completed more than 15,000 days of labour on various humanitarian field projects.

He said the department had so far concentrated on developing the organization, administration and infrastructure of the KPC, on the basic training of the KPC members, coordinated by the IOM, and on the KPC's involvement in humanitarian field projects.

Mr. Nilsson said now they were entering the second phase, concentrating on the KPC's emergency response capacity as well as the overall planning and coordination of the Kosovo Emergency Response System. The monthly running costs for the KPC was approximately 2 million DM, including the wages of the 2000 reservists. Funding has been committed to operate through October.

General Ceku dealt with the challenges and problems facing his organization. He also responded to the criticism often levelled against the KPC.

General Ceku said the demilitarization and transformation of the former Kosovo Liberation Army into the KPC was a great achievement for Kosovo. He said the KPC had a sanctioned strength of 5000, with 2000 of these being reservists. At present its strength is 4604, with the other positions still vacant for want of members from the minority communities. He urged the minority communities to come forward and join the KPC.

He said initially 17,000 KLA members were given temporary ID cards by the IOM. All of them were not under the control of the KPC leadership. The activities of many of these temporary members created problems at a time when the KPC didn't truly exist. He said he recognized that there was a problem of perception in the international community about the KPC and it was essential to change the negative perception created by "unfounded accusations" against the KPC. He pointed out that the funding for the KPC could be affected by such impressions.

General Ceku said the KPC had a special unit that should be used for ceremonial guard of honour whenever foreign dignitaries come to Kosovo. Making a plea for more benefits for the KPC members, General Ceku said the salaries of the KPC members were too low, i.e. from 150 DM to 660 DM. He said the KPC was short of funds and equipment for its work.

General Ceku also urged UNMIK to do something for the KLA war invalids, saying that the KPC with its lack of funds couldn't take the burden alone.

Responding to a question, General Ceku acknowledged there were arms in Kosovo, but said the KPC had nothing to do with them.

Asked about the killings of minorities in the last year, General Ceku categorically denied that the KPC members were involved in any such violence.