

# UNMIK PRESS RELEASE



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## Kouchner Visits Zvecan Smelter

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bernard Kouchner visited the Zvecan lead smelter today, declaring it a "dinosaur .... in desperate shape."

After briefing a group of workers on UNMIK's plans to refurbish the plant, Dr. Kouchner took a tour, along with Multinational Brigade North Commander Gen. Sublet.

Workers had gathered at the plant to get salary advances from UNMIK officials, who have promised to pay some 600 staff while the plant is being refurbished with air control filters.

However, the state of disrepair of the entire lead smelter was far worse than what Dr. Kouchner said he had expected:

"This will be a huge task," he said at the tour's end. "This factory is in a desperate state. It is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century....

"This was a very moving visit. I am thinking about the people, obliged to work, forced to work here... It is unacceptable that people were working here as slaves in the beginning of the 21st century."

Dr. Kouchner said the workers had no choice but to continue operating in highly toxic conditions in order to feed their families, and he blamed the former plant management, who operated the smelter without environmental controls and without ensuring the workers' health was monitored. Of workers who have taken blood tests offered at the plant yesterday by UNMIK, only two had been tested previously--each more than seven years ago.

Blood tests of KFOR soldiers serving near the smelter which were taken in August found their blood lead levels to be unacceptably high. Dr. Kouchner said UNMIK would continue to publish results of tests being taken now in the area.

"We have seen high lead levels in the blood tests already taken," Dr. Kouchner said. "This is a crime. People were really in danger."

He added that the surrounding community was also at risk and that pregnant women had left the area to deliver babies.

Dr. Kouchner explained that the ITT Kosovo Consortium would begin immediately to conduct financial and environmental audits of the entire Trepca mining and metallurgy complex, in addition to installing the air filters at Zvecan. However, he acknowledged that

the \$16 million targeted for the upcoming period would be inadequate given the major repairs that seemed evident from the day's tour.

Asked by media whether with the action on Monday to take control of the plant also meant taking control of northern Mitrovica, Dr. Kouchner replied that, "control is not a good word: We are in charge of the interests of the people. We are working for the people and for us 'the people' are all the communities of Kosovo. We are not acting against the Serbs, but in favour of the Serbs. We will refurbish this very old dinosaur and we will re-open it as soon as possible, for them...However it is true that this is an initiative to go forward with Resolution 1244."

Asked whether Albanians would now enter the smelter work force, Dr. Kouchner reiterated that the plant, situated in a largely Serb-inhabited area in northern Kosovo, would be re-opened for the current work force. "However my idea, my dream, is to put the people of Mitrovica all together in a united city. But this will take time."