

UNMIK PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

UNMIK/PR/373

28 September 2000

KOUCHNER BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON KOSOVO ELECTION PREPARATIONS

The situation of non-Albanian communities remains the biggest problem in Kosovo, SRSG Bernard Kouchner told the United Nations Security Council yesterday in New York.

"Serbs and Roma in particular are often still excluded from daily life and are under great personal security risks," he said during his quarterly update on developments in Kosovo.

Dr. Kouchner left New York today for meetings with US officials in Washington. Over the weekend he and his deputies from UNMIK will participate in a 'lessons learned' conference on Kosovo and East Timor, to be held in Long Island, New York.

Dr. Kouchner told the Security Council that UNMIK has tried to counter "this truly deplorable situation" for minorities with a multitude of initiatives such as the "Agenda for Coexistence", which includes special assistance programmes for the Serbs and the establishment of local community offices to facilitate the access to services and security for non-Albanian communities.

He said that the fate of missing persons and detainees was another key problem facing Kosovo and that he was "extremely concerned" that the remaining prisoners held in Serbia may be forgotten by the world during this time of political turbulence in the FRY.

He outlined the achievements of UNMIK since it was established 15 months ago, but admitted that UNMIK had made mistakes. One was in trying to implement unrealistic policy programmes, "instead of taking the still-existing conflict circumstances into account."

He noted that the Kosovo Serbs had made a bad decision in opting not to participate in the coming municipal elections, but added that the Kosovo Serbs are willing to participate in the elected municipal structures. UNMIK was making a concerted effort to ensure their continued representation, and Kosovo Albanian leaders have accepted such a process, he said.

Dr. Kouchner said that while the UN mandate in Kosovo was ambiguous, Resolution 1244 gives UNMIK a clear line to take in developing interim institutions of self-government. This policy will help UNMIK to reduce ethnic violence, develop the economy, and fulfill its mandate, he said, warning of violent reactions in the future if UNMIK is perceived as an "occupation force".

He also stressed the need for UNMIK to develop an interim constitutional framework to define substantial autonomy and protect the rights of minority communities.

After the elections, there would be a move, in accordance with the terms of Security Council resolution 1244, towards granting Kosovo greater responsibility and autonomy, if the proper conditions existed, he said.

In a press briefing following the Security Council meeting, Dr. Kouchner said that UNMIK would be able to ensure that upcoming municipal elections were fair and democratic. As many as 3,000 observers would be on hand to monitor the 28 October elections.

Following precautions put in place, he said, the level of violence in Kosovo had decreased and there had been no major incident to date in connection with the elections.

Asked about hatred among the various political parties, Dr. Kouchner said it was more prevalent between the communities. As happened in Europe after the Second World War, those who chose to participate with the former ruling structures were often branded as collaborators. Nevertheless, the situation was improving, he said, giving as an example the political parties' work together on an election day free of violence. Not only protecting, but also rebuilding the lives of Kosovo Serbs who may return was another challenge facing the mission, he said.

“It is impossible to force them into loving each other but we must force them to stop killing each other”, he said.

Asked what the impact on Kosovo would be if the opposition prevailed in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Dr. Kouchner said Kosovo would benefit in many ways from a more democratic Serbia. Conditions for Serbs in Kosovo might be eased and there would be the possibility of detainees being released and information exchanged on the missing. He added that it was difficult to evaluate the impact on the independence aspirations of some Kosovars. Some might prefer not to have a “good enemy”, he said.