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Statement by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel of Slovenia in Ljubljana

Following is the statement made by Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari during his joint press conference with Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel of Slovenia in Ljubljana today:

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, I would like to thank Mr Rupel for the excellent meeting we had. I am very pleased to be here. I came yesterday. I had been in the United States where I saw Secretary-General Kofi Annan before he travelled to Europe. Then I went to Washington to discuss with the US government on the Kosovo issue. I came here yesterday and I had the pleasure to have a dinner yesterday evening with my Finnish ambassador here. The president attended the dinner last night.

I have seen the Foreign Minister, then [I will meet] the Prime minister and then I will proceed to Vienna, then to Brussels and from there to Strasbourg and from there to Prag, and then hopefully to Vienna for the weekend.

I am particularly pleased to be here because it is extremely important that I have a chance to consult and hear the representatives of the countries from the region, who are willing to talk about the issues I am dealing with. We had a very, very good exchange of views.

I have explained to the Foreign Minister what we are doing in Vienna. As you know we have started meetings by looking how we can actually *[inaudible: noise]* for the minorities in Kosovo to live a decent life.

Therefore we have had four rounds of meetings on the decentralization of administration. The last round was on 4th and 5th of May. Those are led by my Deputy, the former Secretary of the Austrian Foreign Office Albert Rohan, with my other colleagues from the United Nations

At the moment my deputies are in Belgrade and they are travelling to Pristina tomorrow, preparing for the next round of talks. We will have a meeting on the 23rd in Vienna on cultural heritage and religious sites. This is a very important issue as well within the framework of minority protection. We are also setting a meeting on

economic issues. That is supposed to take place on the 1st of June. I hope that we can still discuss the issue of minority rights in one meeting.

After that it will be stocktaking from my side and we have set new meetings with my colleagues to discuss this matter.

If one looks at the Kosovo situation in general, the next event will be on the 22nd of June when the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Søren Jessen-Petersen will report to the Security Council, particularly on how the Standards have been implemented in Kosovo. I hope he will be in a position to report to the Council that things have been moving, that the new administration in Kosovo has been speeding up the implementation of those Standards that are important for securing a proper life for minorities, and the Serb minority particularly.

After that it will be time for me during the Summer, in July, to brief the Secretary-General and the Security Council how we will move forward after this phase. The idea of course is that we start discussing the actual status issue in the light of these preparatory talks. That is the plan for the future.

I have already announced that I will consult also some of the Contact group and [Security Council] Permanent members States. I will be in Moscow on the 30th of this month and I will be in Beijing on the 5th and 6th of June.

Questions/Answers

***Question (Politika).** The four rounds of discussion in Vienna did not show any improvement. Is it possible to reach the independence for Kosovo Albanians and at the same time not to change the international borders of Serbia? Is it possible to have a win-win situation on the Kosovo issue?*

***Question (Radio Slovenia):** How do you envisage the resolution of the Mitrovica question, which is connected?*

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all, I think it is important to look at the background of our negotiations. We are not starting from an empty situation. We have had developments in the 90's that led the International Community's intervention in Kosovo. We have had for seven years an international presence in Kosovo. It has been run more or less like a UN protectorate, even if we do not have a system anymore in existence. This is the background. Then we have very clear messages from the Contact group in their guiding principles: no partition of Kosovo, Kosovo cannot join any other country; the solution -in a statement from London where the Foreign ministers of the Contact Group met, they also emphasized the fact that solution in Kosovo should - among other things, it is not the only criteria – they said that it should be acceptable to the majority of the population of Kosovo. And they said also that they hope that this issue can be solved during the course of 2006. So, there are many given factors. And also in the guiding principles there is the very clear message that there should be no return to

the time before March 1999 in Kosovo. So we are not discussing the Kosovo issue in a vacuum and that is very important to remember.

I do not necessary agree with you that there is no progress in those talks. I think it would be totally unrealistic for instance – like we had these meeting on the 4th and 5th in Vienna, when parties for the first time come forwards with the ideas how many new municipalities there might be where there could be a Serb majority - it would be totally unrealistic to assume that the parties, after they have presented their solutions – we discussed those for one and a half day, the criteria for instance were discussed for the first time: what should be the criteria when we try to decide ? - that agreement could be reached. But it was the beginning of a process in that particular issue for instance. And that is why my colleagues are travelling at the moment in Belgrade and going to Pristina.

So, we have still a number of issues, even if we would not touch the status issue at all. We have to be able before we move to the status issue to decide that, yes, in the light of these discussions, the Kosovo Albanians have been prepared to move so far that we have been able to create decent living conditions for minorities, and the Serb minority particularly. By the way, there are other minorities. No one seems to be very much worried about the other minorities. But there are as many other minorities from other population groups in Kosovo at the moment as there are Serbs. And you know very well who those minorities are.

Then I do not want to start any speculation at all - in my role as somebody who has to carry this process forward – what the final status is going to be because we are far from that at the moment.

But all the issue we are talking about now, and will continue to talk about up to June, and in part of June as well, have to be solved one way or another, whatever the status will be. There has to be better possibilities for the life of the minorities, and that requires that Kosovo Albanians will create those conditions. But also I would like to emphasize that we need also the cooperation of Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade's encouragement for Kosovo Serbs because you need two to tango. It does help if everyone is persuading Pristina to create conditions if the other side is not prepare to extend its hand and cooperate.

So this has to be done. There is not point of talking about status before these issues are handled. And I would like to ...

***Question (Politika);** And what about borders? Is it possible to change internationally recognised borders of Serbia?*

Martti Ahtisaari: That we will see, when we come to that issue, what will happen. In the same way, I think Mitrovica has been discussed in the last round as well. I cannot give you the exact format how this issue will be solved. But I do not think we should.. when we are looking at solutions, first is that minorities must be safe, comfortable. But this is a general principle, in any administration. That is why we have been looking at decentralization: passing the decision making to the municipalities instead of making decisions in Pristina. That is a general principle that should cover the whole. Good governance requires that people have as much say as possible where

they live instead of deferring everything either to Ljubljana, or to Pristina, or in my country to Helsinki. These are common principles.

Then, let's not forget that, whatever the status is, there is going to be international presence. NATO will be there, EU will be there, OSCE will be there. That is why Slovenia [*inaudible*], being a member of EU, NATO, OSCE – I am talking to the former chairman of the OSCE: it is very important because OSCE has played, and continues to play a very important role, and has a very sizable contingent, not to say anything about your contribution on decentralization.

Let's not hide it: it is a little bit like running a marathon. We may have gone to the first... – marathon is 42 kilometres if I remember right, I have never run any but I saw people running one in Vienna the other Sunday - perhaps we have now run 15 kilometres. So we have a fair number of kilometres still to go. So do not ask me what my time is going to be at the end of the 42 kilometres. But we will get there. Do not worry.