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**Press Briefing by UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo
Martti Ahtisaari in Pristina, June 11, 2006**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

In the past three days, I have been having meetings with Kosovo political leaders, representatives of Kosovo Serbs and other minorities, as well as Kosovo women leaders, I also met the Ambassadors of the Contact Group countries here in Pristina. I went this morning to Mitrovica where, apart from meeting with representatives of the local communities, I also visited the battery-recycling factory in Trepca.

I briefed my interlocutors on where we are in the status process: we have had altogether six rounds of talks in Vienna, covering technical issues such as decentralization, the protection of religious and cultural heritage and economy. We have also sent eight expert missions to Belgrade and Pristina discussing the issues we had covered in the Vienna talks more in details.

I am of the view that we have made progress in these discussions in the sense that everyone is much clearer now where each side stands, so at the end of the process, we can put forward proposals to safeguard the interest and rights of the minorities.

The technical talks will not stop here: in the coming weeks, two expert teams will visit Belgrade and Pristina on two separate issues: decentralization and the protection of religious sites, and this kind of dialogues with the parties – also in other technical areas - will continue as long as both sides feel that further agreements can be achieved.

It is important to demonstrate to the international community that all avenues of negotiations have been exhausted and a thorough process is respected. In this context, I appealed to the Kosovo leaders to be flexible and generous in their approach.

And then where do we go from here? While we further pursue the technical talks, I shall consult the UN Security Council in the first half of July, and after that I intend to engage the parties on the highest level to present their positions on status.

I welcomed the Contact Group's Priorities for Standards Implementation. I cannot overstate the importance of the continuous efforts in this regard. I appealed to the Kosovo leaders to go the extra mile in accommodating the interest of the Kosovo Serbs. It is everybody's responsibility to help to create better living conditions for the minorities, and to convince the international community with the actions that one means what one says when one talks about the multi-ethnic society in Kosovo.

In order to create this multi-ethnic society, it is crucial for the Kosovo Serbs to participate in the Kosovo institutions. I listened carefully to the concerns of the Serbs, and I still believe that to get the best deals for the future, it is in their interest to assert influence on the process by being part of it.

I made this appeal again today in Mitrovica when I urged the Serb community to encourage those qualified candidates to join the Kosovo Police Service and the judges to become available to the courts. And I sensed in my discussions that there is a very positive attitude towards employing more qualified minorities to these entities.

Thank you.

Q(AP): Can you please explain to us in more details how you plan to bring the so called elephant meeting together in July. And you have visited Russia and China, how much is there international consensus: we've see some different opinions coming out of Russia, namely from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Martti Ahtisaari: Before I send the invitation letters for this round which you called elephant round, we have to have a lot of consultations. I hope to see the Contact Group Political Directors before the end of this month - we are working on the dates. And we will be continuing, as I said, the technical discussions throughout the summer. You mentioned my recent visit to Russia: I had been working on the visit for quite some time and we finally found the dates for me to see Foreign Minister Lavrov. In China I met State Councillor Mr. Tang and Foreign Minister Li. I appeal to you to look at the guiding principles and the London Statement at the end of January, the public press statement. There is an enormous unity among the Contact Group on those issues. And nothing in those statements have been withdrawn. But I think that everybody in the Contact Group also emphasises that it is extremely important for their political bodies as well that we can show that at the end of the day we have had a very thorough process. We have left no stones unturned and we have tried to do our utmost. That's why we are going to use the summer time to pursue these talks further. So as long as no one is withdrawing from those guiding principles and London statement and the further statements that have been made since then, we will continue the way we work. And I have always emphasized how important it is to keep the Contact Group together and the reason why I went to Beijing is that China is not part of the CG - I told them that it would have been much easier for me if they had been part of the Contact Group. But that is not the case. It is extremely important that we keep them informed because in the end it's the Security Council that will look into the matter.

Q (Radio Kim): On final outcome

Martti Ahtisaari: I think I have said earlier to you, that you will not hear me speculating on the final outcome of the status talks. I have never in public said anything to that effect. Most of the other parties have said one thing or the other. And of course there are those who argue for independence and have said so in public, including different visitors and dignitaries, and there are those who say they support the far-reaching autonomy. I find it very difficult in my role to engage in discussing this issue. I hope you bear with me, because I think it would be interesting to see what sort of presentations are going to be made in the end of July by both parties, by Belgrade and by Pristina. Because I think it is very important to offer both parties an opportunity, a forum in Vienna to let them explain what they have in mind. Because bits and pieces have come out already in the media but I want to have a proper discussion among the delegations and then we will see how we move from there onwards. But it's basically a forum where I expect both parties to come with their clear understanding on how they see the future status.

Q: (On what UNOSEk will be offering)

Martti Ahtisaari: I was going to say that I will offer electricity and atmosphere for the parties and facilities, but I think those facilities might be offered by the Austrian government. I'm not going to offer them anything else except the opportunity to present their case to each other, and then I hope that we can engage the parties in a discussion. But that sort of meeting is vital and we have said it all along when we have been engaged in these technical discussions on decentralization. Because my argument has been that this first phase - which is not over yet and will not yet be finished by the end of July - the idea of those talks have been to look for conditions for a decent life for all, both minorities in Kosovo but also the majority. But everybody knows that when that process has gone forward, they will come when we have to give the parties a chance to make their full presentation on how they see the future status. Many of the issues that we have been handling so far in those different meetings and expert missions are status neutral, as I have called them. Because under any circumstances - whatever the status may be - we have to secure a decent life for minorities in this society and a decent life for majorities as well. Because if the majority doesn't feel comfortable I think it is impossible to create good conditions for minorities. So that is the general idea of the meeting in July.

Q: on PM Ceku's idea to declare independence

Martti Ahtisaari: I hope we agreed with the Prime Minister that I think it is premature to make this sort of statement at this junction. We are still engaged in a process which is to convince the International Community that Kosovo is ready for new status. By making the decision and allowing the Secretary-General appointing me as his Special Envoy for future status negotiations, Security Council indicated that the present status quo as it is here on the ground couldn't continue anymore, so we have to look for future status. And therefore International community is expecting from this process a clear message that yes, Kosovo is ready to move to a new status. So, I think the meeting has to be approached - the next meeting in Vienna - has to be approached from this point of view

and I don't think it would be helpful to the process if any decision on independence were made unilaterally. I think it would be counter productive.

Q: on whether the SE is happy with the progress made so far and on SLKM's proposal

Martti Ahtisaari: I think there is clearly progress made on the discussions that were held in Vienna on the cultural heritage and religious sites. And as I indicated earlier on Monday that there are going to be further discussions at the expert level in Decani. And I hope, for instance, when we have been talking about the protective zones, that solutions can be found. When it comes to the numbers of Serb majority municipalities, I think there is still a lot of work that needs to be done, because the proposals were fairly far away from each other. If I recall correctly, the Kosovo Serbs came up with 14 new municipalities and an enlargement of 4. In other words 18 altogether. And Pristina's proposal was for 3. My colleagues have been discussing some other alternatives. I think that truth may in the end be somewhere between these two, and I am very much looking forward and I have encouraged both parties to be forthcoming in Decani on Monday when my colleagues meet with them. On economic issues we have still a long way to go. Because we only had one meeting and the facts were basically put on the table and it will take sometime to check those before we can go further. I have thanked both the Prime Minister and the President that they have been reaching out to the minority communities: they have visited different places, attended meetings there. Unfortunately, in some cases where they have wanted to do even further, they have not been welcome to do so. And I have appealed to the Kosovo Serb community that in order to facilitate the positive measures from the government side, it is important that the Kosovo Serbs also actively participate in these efforts.

I don't think that we will invite any observers, like SLKM, to Vienna talks. We have only 2 delegations. I think the only group of observers I can think of inviting as a Chairman - because I will be chairing those meetings - will most probably be the Contact Group Representatives. But that I have to discuss with them. I don't exclude that option.

Q: on if Kosovo is a special case and what it means?

Martti Ahtisaari: I would say that every crisis situation is a special case. Because every crisis situation has its own history and I think that no one will argue in this room that Kosovo has its own history, even if we only look at from 1989 onwards and not go any further than that in history: the unconstitutional abolition of the autonomy in '89 which led then to the negative measures against the majority here, which led to enormous number of people leaving Kosovo and then intervention of international community and the de facto 7 years of UN trusteeship even though we don't have the system anymore. So this is a special case, but I would say in the same way that all the other trouble spots in the world they have their own history. And I think all over them will require special measures so I have never accepted the argument that one can say what is perhaps happening in Kosovo is something that forms a precedent for other issues. I know that opinions are divided on that in the international community, but I have to say - which I have said very often in different gatherings - that the international community has never

been terribly consistent in dealing with, even slightly similar issues. So every time we have to have a separate discussion if there is an attempt to solve within the accepted norms these problems.

Q: (RTK television) I am interested to know, you had a meeting yesterday with Serb leaders and also today with Serb leaders in North Mitrovica. So, you encourage them to be part of our institutions to help to build a multi-ethnic Kosovo, what if they are not interested to help to build the multi-ethnic Kosovo, are we still going to have two parts of Mitrovica or one Mitrovica?

Martti Ahtisaari: Of course one can never force anyone to participate. I think in a society people have the choice whether they want to participate or they don't want to. But my point was that when I listened to the concerns, for instance, that there have been incidents against Serbs, sometimes as it is said that there is a doubt that it is ethnically motivated in some cases. But in order to be able to govern the society my argument in every situation - whether I would be speaking to Kosovo Serbs in this case or in some other society - would be that if you want to be sure that there is a better performance by the police and the courts, let your people participate so you have competent policemen. Let them join the police force. Let your judges play a part in the court system of the country. Hopefully then you will get a balanced view. I hope that Kosovo will never have a police force or a legal system that would try to favour one or the other. Because in any society, if you go around the world and ask people what are the most important things in their lives, the answer without exception is we want to be treated fairly by the police and by the courts. Because then we can go around our life freely and make the best of our lives if we can be sure of those.

So, partly these problems, as I said this morning, are self-inflicted wounds, because if you don't participate and you then criticize, my answer is then join for God's sake. Let your competent people join because they are welcome, it's not a question that they would not be wanted. Everyone I talk to says that we want to have more people from different communities.

Q: And Mitrovica?

Martti Ahtisaari: I don't want to get into that because we are still discussing the issue. We have to find a solution to that and there are different proposals by the parties and we have to continue and I have to let my colleagues continue those talks as I said to you.

Q (Televizia Most): on possible mass exodus of Serbs when the status is resolved.

Martti Ahtisaari: First of all I hope that sort of situation will never occur. There is no question about that. As I said earlier what we are trying in these talks is to see that we can do to create conditions where the majority of the population and the minorities can live comfortably in this society, so they can have a normal life, participating in the economy. And if we succeed - and I have to convince myself that we have been able to create those conditions before I would be recommending anything. If after that, they still want to

leave, then they leave for different reasons. So much will depend on under what circumstances some people want to leave. My and my colleagues' work is to create conditions so no one needs to leave this society. But in a democratic world, you can never force people to stay if for one reason or the other they want to leave, but then it's not anymore a question that the conditions are not there. So that is partly our responsibilities, but it is of course also as much the responsibility of the PISG to create those conditions and Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade to assist in creating those conditions. We need everybody on that. It's not only the Prime Minister who has to implement the standards - everyone has to contribute to this effort.

Thank you very much. I hope you now allow me to catch my plane.