

6 February 2006

Special Envoy Mr. Ahtisaari's press encounter after meeting with the Foreign Minister of France in Paris

I am delighted to be here in Paris. I wanted to come and thank the French Government and the Minister in particular for the constructive role that France has played as an important member of the Contact Group.

I regard the role of the Contact Group extremely important. My terms of reference come from the Secretary-General - I am Secretary-General's Special Representative - but I am in a lucky position that we have a Contact Group, and its guiding principles as well as the statement from the London meeting on 31st January. Both the guiding principles and the statement from London were unanimously endorsed by the Contact Group .

***Question:** what's your response to President Putin's remarks?*

I think I am more interested in recognizing that the Contact Group has been absolutely unanimous in the guiding principles and the latest statement. I would draw your attention to this when you asked me about President Putin's statement. He didn't say that we should not try to find a future status for Kosovo, and I am only dealing with the Kosovo issue...There is an (on-going)discussion. There are those of us who argue that Kosovo is a special case, but it doesn't prevent us - all of us, including the Contact Group member states - to try to find a solution to the future status of Kosovo.

Before we start talking about future status of Kosovo, we will start to talk about the practical issues. We hope to see both Pristina and Belgrade delegations in Vienna on the 20th of this month to discuss the decentralization of administration in Kosovo which is part of the discussion on how we protect the minorities and facilitate the life of the minorities in Kosovo in a proper manner.

We don't need to start discussing the future status now, we (first) look at the practical issues and then we move from there. This is the first time that the delegations will meet in Vienna on this, we had scheduled the meeting already on the 25th of January but because of the death of President Rugova, we postponed it because there was an official mourning period of two weeks. And we will start talking about other practical issues: the religious heritages, the return of refugees to wherever they would like to, and the property issues have to be settled.

Not all these standards that have been discussed and reported to the Security Council will be fulfilled by the time the future status is hopefully decided, because if Kosovo would meet by that time all the standards then perhaps we could start considering it as a member of the EU. I think we all understand that the standards issues will be discussed for many years, but there are some crucial standards that have to be met before we can actually start talking about the status, and the protection of minorities is one of the central ones.

Question: So do you think you will be able to do this by the end of the year?

I think there again, I tend to agree with the Contact Group which says that we should try to look for the settlement of the future status of Kosovo during the course of 2006. I think your guess is as good as mine. The easiest thing is to be sceptical.

I started last year in January one peace negotiation between the Indonesia Government and the Free Ache Movement. We agreed that we should try and finish this in half a year. To everybody's surprise we did it. So I think it's always good to have a target. Let's put some discipline into the negotiations as well, and the attitudes have to change. People have to start to tolerate each other. The sooner that happens the better. That is a process that will take a long time. I can't ask people to love each other immediately but if they tolerate each other, it's a good beginning.

Thank you.