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High-level delegations of Serbia, Kosovo hold first status talks in Vienna

Vienna – High-level delegations of Serbia and Kosovo today met in Vienna under the auspices of the Secretary-General Special Envoy for the future status process for Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari. Belgrade delegation was led by President Boris Tadic and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and Pristina's Team of Unity was led by President Fatmir Sejdiu.

"The High level meeting we just had here is a result of the clear wish on the part of the parties to move to direct talks on the future status", the Special Envoy said at a press conference afterwards, adding: "As the first meeting of its kind, today's discussion was meant to enable both sides to present and argue their respective positions, and the meeting did achieve that objective."

Mr Ahtisaari said that the presentations showed that "it is evident that the positions of the parties remain far apart: Belgrade would agree to almost anything but independence, whereas Pristina would accept nothing but full independence."

"We are ready to continue to facilitate the dialogue on the political level", the Special Envoy said, adding that "whether these talks would bring any agreement ultimately depends on the willingness and readiness of the parties".

Mr Ahtisaari expressed UNOSEK intention to move rapidly forward with further discussions on the technical aspects. He said that "although progress has been uneven, these talks have provided us with the basis on which to continue to move forward." The Special Envoy continued to say that discussions would focus increasingly on areas which have not been discussed – namely, community rights and constitutional and institutional aspects of the status process. Mr Ahtisaari called both parties to be "realistic and flexible" in order to achieve substantial progress in these areas requires the parties.

Mr Ahtisaari recalled that one of the central aims of the international community is to create conditions in Kosovo where all communities can live in a multi-ethnic society. In order to be able to create these conditions, the full support of Serbia is of vital importance. It is not possible to create appropriate conditions if Belgrade refuses to cooperate on this matter.

The Special Envoy said he reminded the participants to the High-Level meeting that the current process is about all the people of Kosovo, from all of Kosovo's communities. "The people expect them to exercise leadership, so does the international community", he said. In that context, he welcomed the latest statement by the Contact Group delivered in the High-Level meeting.