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Press Release

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UNHCR Welcomes the Passage of the Amnesty Law

SKOPJE – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomes yesterday's adoption of the Law on Amnesty in the Macedonian Parliament which also covers draft evaders and deserters. UNHCR hopes the new law will help reconcile rival ethnic communities and encourage return of people uprooted by the conflict.

UNHCR has long advocated and lobbied for the law, along with the European Union, NATO, OSCE, and the Government.

Some 170,000 people were driven from their homes during last year's fighting. More than 140,000 have now gone back since but there are some who remain reluctant to return to their homes due to the lack of an amnesty bill. Others are fearing reprisals for desertion or refusal to fight.

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'UNHCR sincerely hopes that with the passage of this law, one of the impediment to return will be removed and the situation will gradually become more stable', says Amin Awad, head of the UN Refugee Agency in Skopje.

Some 9,000 refugees remain in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, mainly in Kosovo, while 17,000 persons are still displaced within the country.

For further information, please contact the Public Information Unit at 00389 2 118 641, extension 2700