



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Bosnie-Herzégovine (79)

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UNHCR

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30/10-02

Dear Mr. Thousig Jensen,

Thank you for your letter of 29 July 2002 in which you requested that UNHCR defines the meaning of "severely traumatised".

I would like to emphasise that UNHCR does not have the expertise to fully define or determine when a person is traumatized or the level of the traumatisation. This is clearly an area for psychologists.

In its position paper of 2001, UNHCR referred to traumatised individuals, such as victims of torture or particularly egregious forms of violence (for example ex-detainees, or survivors of sexual violence), or witness to crimes against humanity, in that their past experiences will be highly relevant in determining their continued protection needs. Even in the application of the cessation clauses, a general humanitarian principle is reflected. This principle can be applied, by analogy, to other cases. Paragraph 136 of the UNHCR Handbook indicates:

"It is frequently recognised that a person who - or whose family - has suffered from atrocious forms of persecution should not be expected to repatriate. Even though there may have been a change of regime in his country, this may not always produce a complete change in the attitude of the population, nor, in view of past experience, in the mind of the refugee."

Moreover, it should be added that Bosnia still has limited facilities and resources to deal with persons suffering from PTSD. This has been described in the 2001 position paper. In addition, the UNHCR Health Report of 2001 (web address <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/balkans-country?country=bosnia&display=docs>) makes reference to the unsatisfactory situation regarding availability of facilities and medicines to treat mental trauma and neuropsychiatric disorders.

In view of the numerous enquiries that your firm has forwarded to UNHCR to date, I suggest that for further enquiries you contact:

The UNHCR Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries,
~~Ynglingagatan 14~~, 6th Floor
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Yours sincerely,

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