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Udtalelse fra UNHCR om situationen i Østslavonien

Udenrigsministeriet fremsendes vedlagt kopi af en fra UNHCR modtaget udtalelse af 26. februar 1999 omhandlende situationen i Østslavonien.

P.M.V

E.B.


Peder Ventegodt



**NATIONS UNIES
HAUT COMMISSARIAT
POUR LES REFUGIES**



**UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES**

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26 February 1999

BY FAX AND BY POST

Dear Mr. Torpegaard Hansen,

Reference is made to Ms. Skipper's letter of 12 February 1999, in which Denmark asked for information concerning the situation in the Croatian Danube region.

I would like to confirm that the "UNHCR Position Paper regarding the Treatment of Asylum-Seekers originating from Eastern Slavonia" of 11 February 1998 remains valid. The general conclusion stated in the paper that some asylum-seekers from the region may indeed have a well founded fear of persecution within the terms of the 1951 Convention, remains UNHCR's position. Each case, therefore, should be examined on the individual facts and a judgement should be made whether the harassment and discrimination are so severe on a cumulative basis as to amount to persecution and, hence, warrant the grant of refugee status.

On the prospects for return of rejected asylum-seekers from Denmark after a full and fair assessment of their claim, UNHCR would like to highlight the following.

As your Government is aware, even if an individual is clearly a citizen of the Republic of Croatia and is in possession of Croatian documentation, return would not be without difficulty. At the central level, the Government of Croatia has an official policy of non-discrimination of its citizens regardless of ethnicity – a policy which is not fully implemented on the ground. As repeatedly reported on by both UNHCR and the OSCE, ethnic Serb returnees – whether from other parts of Croatia or abroad – continue to have difficulties in enjoying a number of entitlements such as health care, social and pension benefits and, in some cases, education.

More importantly, despite the official launch of the Croatian Return Programme on 26 June 1998, ethnic Serbs find it impossible in most cases to repossess their property – or reassert tenancy rights over State-owned property – and obtain assistance for the reconstruction of damaged houses. As elsewhere in Croatia, property reconstruction is limited and has mainly benefited ethnic Croats. Despite the establishment of a number of Housing Commissions within the framework of the Government's return programme, the inability of returnees to occupy their rightful property remains a source of concern to the international community. Furthermore, the OSCE has identified shortcomings in the implementation of the Government's Programme for the Establishment of Trust amongst all national communities.

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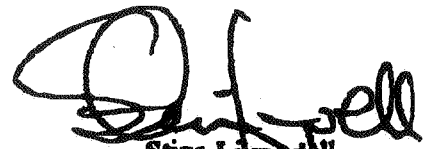
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Ethnic Serbs displaced from other parts of Croatia to the Danube region have come under tremendous pressure from ethnic Croats returning to the region who wish to repossess their property. This has resulted in a number of incidents of intimidation and harassment.

Finally, the region continues to be economically depressed. Employment opportunities are rare, especially for ethnic Serbs who continue to be discriminated against in favour of ethnic Croats, whether in the public or private sector. The return of rejected asylum-seekers will undoubtedly place an additional strain on the already limited resources available. It is important to recall that ethnic Serbs continue to leave the Croatian Danube region, although in smaller numbers. The continued departures are a strong indication of the sentiment of these populations of their prospects for integration as full-fledged citizens of the Republic of Croatia.

I hope the above information will be of use to the Danish authorities in deciding whether to return rejected asylum-seekers from Eastern Slavonia, and remain at your disposal for any additional information which you may require.

Yours sincerely



Stina Ljungdell
Desk Officer
Bureau for Europe