



# Press Release

## Secretary-General

United Nations

Department of Public Information • News and Media Services Division • New York

SG/T/2357

2 December 2002

### ACTIVITIES OF SECRETARY-GENERAL IN CROATIA, 20-21 NOVEMBER

In the morning of 20 November, the Secretary-General flew to Zagreb, where he was greeted on arrival by Croatian President Stjepan Mesic. He and the President then walked across the road from the airport terminal and into a small park. There, they dedicated a memorial to the peacekeepers who lost their lives in the former Yugoslavia during the war there.

Remembering the fallen peacekeepers, the Secretary-General said, we also remember "the thousands of people from Croatia and its neighbours, of different faiths and ethnicities, who died in this conflict".

"Even at the darkest hour of the conflict", he went on, it was the hope of a new era based on tolerance, diversity and human rights, that sustained our peacekeepers. "As we watch that dawn rise", he concluded, "we shall know that their sacrifice was not in vain." (See Press Release SG/SM/8514.)

The Secretary-General and the President then had a meeting, after which they each made statements to the press. The Secretary-General commented on the positive steps that had been taken by Croatia towards building a solid democratic State. He also noted that, having once been a recipient of United Nations peacekeepers, Croatia was now an active peacekeeping participant.

In the afternoon, he also met with Croatia's Prime Minister, Ivica Racan. The Secretary-General welcomed Croatia's efforts to improve its relations with its neighbours. He said that Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte told him that morning that she was satisfied with Croatia's cooperation with The Hague Tribunal.

On the United Nations Mission in Prevlaka, the Prime Minister said he expected final agreement in a matter of days. They also discussed refugees, internally displaced persons and the missing.

After a brief meeting with Speaker of the Parliament Zlatko Pomcic, the Secretary-General addressed the Croatian Parliament. (See Press Release SG/SM/8513.)

"You are putting the ideologies of the past behind you", he said, "and cultivating the spirit of true democracy. You have understood that democracy is not simply a matter of elections and majority rule. Democracy requires also respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, and freedom of expression."

(more)

"It involves listening as well as speaking", he went on. "It involves painfully seeking compromises, so that no one's views or interests are ignored." At the conclusion of his speech the Parliamentarians rose and applauded.

He then met with Croatia's Foreign Minister, Tonino Picula. In the late afternoon, he met with the United Nations country team at UN House in Zagreb, after which he addressed the United Nations staff.

Nane Annan, the Secretary-General's wife, visited the main children's hospital in Zagreb, where she spoke with staff about their trauma work to help young victims of child abuse and violence. She also met volunteers who take and refer child abuse calls from the public, as well as young people working as peer educators to warn their friends and peers of the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

In the evening, the Secretary-General and his wife were the guests of honour at an official dinner hosted by the President.

The Secretary-General and his party departed Zagreb for Amsterdam early the next morning.

\* \* \* \* \*