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STATEMENT

by H.E. Mr. Vuk Drašković
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro
at the 61st session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights
High-Level Segment
Geneva, 16 March 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to participate in this high level segment of the 61st session of the Commission on Human Rights. Mr. Chairman, I am confident that under your leadership this session of the Commission will be a fruitful one.

I would also like to extend our best wishes to Ms. Louise Arbour, since this is the first session of the Commission after she assumed her important responsibilities of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Commission's work should certainly benefit from her well known dynamism and commitment to human rights.

This Commission session is indeed a significant one. 2005 is the year when we celebrate anniversary of the United Nations. At this junction the Human Rights Commission faces challenges of reform, as the whole UN system does. Findings of the High Level Panel on UN Reforms reiterated among other requirements the need for the Human Rights Commission to adjust to the new realities. These new realities include the dilemma how to achieve balance between the struggle against global terrorism and preservation of human rights principles, how to address increasing religious and racial intolerances, xenophobia and other similar phenomena. The list is long.

My country aligned with the Statement of the European Union Presidency which addressed some of these problems.

Domestically, the year between the previous and current session of the Commission was a period of building up of institutions that should harmonize our system with the EU legislation and best practices in the field of human rights. Recently, we in Serbia and Montenegro also made progress in one specific area – cooperation with the Hague International Tribunal.

With regard to our internal efforts, I wish to recall that in July of last year the Human Rights Committee discussed the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Serbia and Montenegro and confirmed that the country achieved important progress in the field of human rights, emphasizing also that much work lies ahead.

On basis of our initiative the Committee made another important conclusion – that United Nations Interim Administration in our province of Kosovo and Metohija should report on the human rights situation there. We hope that UNMIK will act soon.

The United Nations, UNMIK in particular, has enormous responsibilities to deal with tragic and unacceptable situation of human rights in Kosovo and Metohija.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If a man deprived of his basic human rights is a slave, then there are about 300.000 slaves in Europe today. They live in my country, Serbia and Montenegro.

I am talking about the non-Albanians, mainly Serbs, discriminated against in Kosovo and Metohija, part of the territory of Serbia under the administration of the United Nations and its military and police forces since 10 June 1999.

Let me present to you some of the facts:

First, according to Amnesty International figures, approximately 230.000 Serbs and other non-Albanians have been driven out of Kosovo and Metohija. More than 40.000 of their homes have been destroyed and thousands forcibly occupied. Even UNHCR has recorded a decreasing number of returns. In 2003, 3.800 non-Albanians returned to Kosovo and Metohija, while last year that number dropped to a mere 2.300.

Second, 150 centuries-old churches and monasteries have been burned down, demolished and otherwise destroyed. Many Christian cemeteries have also been targets of acts of vandalism.

Third, more than 70.000 Serbs and other non-Albanians living in so-called enclaves, small scattered islands in a sea of Albanian majority, are not only deprived of freedom of movement and employment, but also of life. Among the civilians who were killed there were many children. Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija go to their fields, schools and churches escorted by KFOR soldiers in armored vehicles.

The United Nations is under the obligation to protect the fundamental human rights of these people: safe living conditions, safe returns, freedom of movement, freedom to enjoy all ethnic, human and cultural rights, rebuilding of what has been destroyed, and restitution of the dispossessed property.

In other words, this is a *conditio sine qua non*, a condition above all conditions, if part of present-day Europe is to rid itself of a system of ethnic masters and ethnic slaves.

A future status of Kosovo, talked about a lot these days, must, above all, be a human status and must not be made conditional to anything.

Thank you.