



Reply to
Attention of

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Multi-National Brigade (East)
Camp Bondsteel
APO AE 09340



Press Release 18-04
For immediate release
April 29, 2004

MNB (E) sponsors luncheon with local leaders and UNMIK representatives

Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo – Multi-national Brigade (East) hosted a United States Office in Pristina sponsored luncheon Wednesday dedicated to discussion of reconciliation between Kosovo-Serbs and Kosovo-Albanians and to developing trust and building relations across ethnic lines.

The event, which took place in Camp Bondsteel's North Dining Facility, gathered MNB(E) leadership, municipal presidents from around the MNB(E) area of responsibility, and United Nations Mission in Kosovo personnel. It featured presentations by two experts on reconciliation brought in by USOP as well as an open forum during which local leaders were encouraged to share their views of the social situation in the region.

In his opening comments USOP Spokesperson Michael W. McClellan drew parallels between the social tension in Kosovo with the history of similar race relation problems in the U.S., making the point that those experiences taught that open and honest dialogue was the best way to resolve those conflicts. Brig. Gen. Rick Erlandson, MNB(E) commanding general, then addressed the group, emphasizing that the bulk of reconciliation work was the responsibility of local leadership.

"If you as leaders cannot accept different views and different opinions, then the people you lead cannot either," Erlandson said. "Each of you agreed that violence will not move the province of Kosovo forward," he said, adding that the only way their communities would forsake violence would be if they saw that attitude from the leadership. "In the Army we call that leading by example," he said.

The first guest speaker of the event, Theo Brown, who spent the last 30 years working with organizations dedicated to peace, reconciliation and social justice, described the social tension in Kosovo as more complicated than just inter-ethnic. He drew comparisons between the social environment of the U.S. in the 1960s that led to riots and the current environment of Kosovo, citing economic strains and the lack of jobs as two common factors. He also presented the local leadership with several recommendations on how they could improve the social environment in

Kosovo, saying the leaders need to present clear expressions of regret and denunciations of violence, they need to send clear signals about their desires for a multi-ethnic region, they need to create a climate for coexistence by creating institutions for a secure and safe society, they need to use dialogue to build trust between their ethnic populations, and they need to find ways to work together on problems common to both sides.

The second guest speaker, Dr. Bert Ransom, who worked as an aid to the legendary U.S civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also drew parallels between the current situation in Kosovo and that of the U.S. in the 1960s. He presented himself, as an African American, as an example of someone who has lived under oppression and racial tension but has not allowed it to turn him to violence, saying, "I know first hand what it is like to be rejected, but I do not carry the baggage of hate."

After the speakers completed their presentations and the luncheon meal, the assembled local leaders, including the municipal presidents of Novo Brdo, Kamenica, Gnjilane, Vitina, Kacanik, Ferizaj, and Strpce, were given the opportunity to respond to the presentations in an open forum. During that time many took the opportunity to express their desire for a peaceful, equitable, and multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Erlandson said he considered the event a success and a crucial step in providing Kosovo with a peaceful future and he said MNB(E) leadership would be looking for future opportunities to hold similar discussions.

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