

Statement by Mr. Gokhool on the situation in Kosovo –
26 June 2002

First of all, my delegation joins others in thanking Mr. Guéhenno for his informative briefing today on the situation in Kosovo.

As the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) celebrates its third anniversary this month, we would like to pay tribute to all those who have worked, and all those who are still working hard, to establish peace and stability in Kosovo.

The international community and UNMIK in particular, can look back with satisfaction on the great achievements made since the Mission's arrival in Kosovo. No doubt, still more needs to be done. The reins are now in the hands of local leaders, to build a society based on democracy, multi-ethnicity and the rule of law. The international community cannot disengage itself at this stage from Kosovo, at least not until it is reassured that the newly established Government is able to manage its affairs in the best interests of all. With the appointment of the Inter-Ministerial Coordinator on Returns, the Kosovo Government is now fully constituted and reflects the multi-ethnic character of the population. Without doubt, the members of the Government, having taken the oath of office, will have to work together in shaping the future of Kosovo without discrimination on any grounds. We take note of the positive developments and encourage the leaders to work truthfully by the letter and spirit of the Constitutional Framework Agreement, and in line with resolution 1244 (1999).

We are happy to note that the ingredients necessary to make the machinery function in Kosovo are in place. In fact, the minorities have appointed their representative; the members of the Government have taken their oath to show allegiance to their respective posts; and laws are being passed to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities into the mainstream of society. Moreover, the robust campaigning by UNMIK and KFOR to combat crime and other illegal activities has been successful in steadily reducing the crime rates.

The economy is picking up, and increasing numbers of schools and hospitals are operating.

All these developments are most welcome. We hope that this trend will continue and that Kosovo will soon be able to be a stable and peaceful place where all communities participate in the institutions that have been set up under resolution 1244 (1999). We encourage minority communities, especially in the Mitrovica region, to abandon parallel structures and to abide by the law enforced by UNMIK and KFOR.

Regional integration is an important factor in the development of Kosovo. The provisional self-government should strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries, in particular with Belgrade. We believe that enhanced cooperation with the Belgrade authorities is an important component in helping to solve the many difficult remaining issues, especially in the upcoming municipal elections. We appreciate the efforts of the authorities in Belgrade to help the Serb communities to participate in larger numbers, thus making the exercise more participatory and representative.

As regards the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, the steps taken by the Government of Kosovo and UNMIK to encourage mass returns are noteworthy. Now that the Serb community has its representatives in the Government, their concerns will be properly addressed and the return of members of that community to their homes will be facilitated. However, we believe that in order to be sustainable it is more than necessary for that process to have continued assistance from the donor community.

Finally, we extend a special thanks to Mr. Steiner, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his commendable efforts in advancing the peace process in Kosovo. We agree with his observation that Kosovo's institutions should be ready for Kosovo to advance towards a fair and just society.