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**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS NOT TO RUSH THE RETURN OF REFUGEES**

Amnesty International is concerned that there are continuing risks for refugees who are likely to be returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the near future. The recent detention of 16 people by Bosnian Serb forces in Sarajevo, some of whom were ill-treated, highlights the need for governments hosting refugees to proceed with extreme caution in planning their return.

The human rights organization is calling for the Humanitarian Issues Working Group (HIWG) on Former Yugoslavia to link the timing of the repatriation of Bosnian refugees to the evolution of the situation on the ground. The HIWG, which brings together governments hosting refugees and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is to meet in Geneva on 16 January to establish a plan for the repatriation of Bosnian refugees.

“Until the parties to the Dayton agreement can demonstrate their ability to provide protection on the ground to returning refugees Amnesty International would be concerned with any attempt at forcibly returning refugees,” the human rights organization said.

Previous agreements providing for the return of Croat and Muslim displaced persons have not been successful, despite numerous commitments by the parties. For example, an additional agreement signed in Dayton for the return of 200 Croats to Travnik and Bugojno and 100 Muslims to Jajce and Stolac was largely disregarded by the authorities on the ground.

Amnesty International is calling on all governments, particularly those giving protection to large numbers of refugees, for example, Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, Denmark and Norway to give careful consideration to the situation on the ground in any plans for repatriation. It calls for continuing effective protection to remain in place until a durable and substantive improvement is seen on the ground and fears that, whatever the outcome of the HIWG meeting, pressure by governments to return Bosnian refugees is likely to grow.

The organization is particularly concerned that any plans for the return of Bosnian refugees also makes provision for the special risks that might be faced by some individuals, for example, those in or from mixed marriages or those accused of desertion or avoiding military service.