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BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: IMPUNITY AND RIGHT TO RETURN -- DANGER AREAS OF PEACE AGREEMENT

WASHINGTON -- The Bosnia peace agreement forged over the past three weeks in Dayton, Ohio runs the risk of letting human rights violators walk free, Amnesty International said.

Based on early reports, the peace agreement seems to make broad commitments for governments to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and excludes those indicted from holding political office.

"What we hoped to hear, but have not, is a specific commitment by the parties to hand over those indicted to the tribunal," Amnesty International said. "Past vague commitments to cooperate with the tribunal have not amounted to much in practice."

Although the parties reportedly have agreed to give the tribunal unimpeded access to grave sites, and witnesses to and victims of human rights violations, they have not specifically agreed to surrender suspects to the tribunal. As well, the multinational force is obligated only to arrest indicted suspects when they see them, but not to search for them.

The other flaw in the agreement is that it forces those who fled the conflict to choose whether they will return to their homes or receive compensation. Many people have been forcibly expelled from their homes as apart of a deliberate policy and many vacated homes have been taken over by displaced persons. Amnesty International believes that all people should have the right to return with adequate guarantees for their safety and be compensated for where houses have been deliberately destroyed.

"Peace is more than maintaining a ceasefire. Confidence building is more than enforcing territorial divides," Amnesty International said. "Human rights violations have fanned the flames of this conflict, and respect for those rights is an essential building block to long-term peace."

"In the past, other peace agreements have fallen down on political will and practical steps to redress the past and foster human rights protection in future."

In the lead up to the conference scheduled for early December, Amnesty International will be calling on states which are involved in this process to spell out in detail how the principles in the agreement will be implemented.

"The US and its European partners in particular need to show they have the political and financial will to make the human rights commitments stick," Amnesty International said.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

THE FOLLOWING IS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S INITIAL REACTION TO THE BOSNIA PEACE AGREEMENT FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE. FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE PROVIDED TO INTERESTED MEDIA FOLLOWING AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DETAILED HUMAN RIGHTS ANNEX TO THE AGREEMENT.