# UNMIK/PR/1101

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**SRSG Harri Holkeri’s Speech at New Year’s Reception**

**13-01-04**

PRISTINA - SRSG Harri Holkeri made the following remarks at the New Year’s reception held in UNMIK today:

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, to those whom I have not yet had the chance to do so, let me wish a very happy, healthy and successful New Year! To all of you, a warm welcome.

We face considerable challenges in 2004:

* completing the Implementation Work Plan as soon as possible***,*** and implementing Standards for Kosovo,
* holding fair and just parliamentary elections,
* ensuring that Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade finally moves forward,
* enabling the safe return and resettlement of displaced persons,
* proceeding with privatization,
* establishing an effective market economy,
* ensuring the rule of law,
* promoting multi-ethnicity at all levels,
* ensuring a safe and secure environment for all the citizens of Kosovo,
* remaining vigilant to the threat of extremism and terrorism.

Kosovo may be a safer place than it was one year ago. It certainly is much safer than it was two years ago.

Nevertheless, as the drive-by shooting near Lipljan Saturday night and the resulting clash between Serb and Albanian villagers on Sunday have shown, anger, frustration and intolerance still simmer below the surface.

Similarly, the peaceful celebration of Orthodox Christmas in Decani last week was marred by a few loaded-snowballs aimed at a busload of pilgrims. The result was a string of protests, very negative media coverage and a discussion in the Security Council.

Our relations with the Kosovo Serbian community remain quite fragile, influenced as much by “snowballs”, as by uncertainty over the future government in Belgrade, returnees’ insecurity or parliamentary quarrels.

Our relations with the Albanian majority community are good even if we don’t always see eye to eye. What Assembly President Nexhat Daci wisely calls mahalla politics – unfortunately still is very much present in Kosovo politics. That means local interests and party interests often have primacy over the common good; too many politicians remain unwilling or unable to see beyond the horizon to understand the interests of the international community.

Kosovo cannot remain in a vacuum. We are still here to help Kosovo, not to hinder it. Our aim is to get the job done of readying Kosovo for resolution of future status, and then leave. But to get there, the standards must be implemented and adhered to.

This is not a game. It is serious and will have lasting consequences. There are no guarantees. Don’t think that all that needs to be done is to be patient until mid-2005 and everything will take care of itself. It will not work that way.

The minority communities must feel safe and secure. Returnees must not feel threatened. The returns must be sustainable.

As I told a television audience recently, Kosovo is at a crossroads and must choose whether to take the high road taken by the new democracies of central and eastern Europe. Fifteen years after the largely peaceful revolutions that ended totalitarian rule these societies now are on the verge of joining the European Union.

The alternative is to take the low road of perpetual conflict, corruption and organized crime. The choice is Kosovo’s and it must be conscious.

Thank you.