

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 4, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write as leaders of the Croatian Caucuses in the U.S. House and Senate to express concern about the plight of Croats, especially of Catholic Croats, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This letter also serves as a follow-up to one sent to you in January by the National Federation of Croatian Americans, which has yet to be answered.

We recently met with Cardinal Vinko Puljic of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. The Conference has documented a disturbing decline in the number of Catholic Croats living in the region, despite their desire to live there peacefully. Nearly 200,000 ethnically cleansed Croats from the Republika Srpska, the Serbian governing entity, along with the predominately Muslim Bosniaks, are unable to return to their pre-war homes.

The ongoing problems confronting Catholics and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been recently highlighted again by Bishop Franjo Komarica, whose diocese is based in the Republika Srpska. Bishop Komarica detailed numerous cases of the destruction of personal and real property of Croat returnees to the area, including in Šimići, Ivanjska and Rajša. In each of these cases, the complaints of the local Croats have been ignored by local Republika Srpska police forces.

At first glance, these incidents may appear to be nothing more than acts of petty crime. However, we believe that—given the history of the Republika Srpska and the continued threats made by Republika Srpska leaders to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina—they are part of an organized attempt to dissuade potential returnees from doing so and to pressure the last remaining Croats to either leave the territory of the Republika Srpska or to intimidate them into remaining silent in opposing the position taken by Republika Srpska authorities concerning the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As you know, the Dayton Peace Accords provided for the return of displaced persons to Bosnia and Herzegovina and protection of their exercise of basic rights. Yet we hear reports of continued discrimination against minorities living among the majority

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populations, especially of Catholic Croats, and that funds designated for aid to refugees have been directed instead to other ethnic groups.

We request two actions of you. First, please respond in a substantive way to the January 24, 2011, letter from the National Federal of Croatian Americans on this issue. Second, please send a strong message to the governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina that they must comply with Dayton Peace Accords which provides for safe passage of displaced persons and refugees, regardless of ethnicity, and that these people must be permitted to return to their homeland to pursue safe and productive lives.



Mark Begich
United States Senate

Sincerely,



Elton Gallegly
United States House of Representatives