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United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

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UN SECURITY COUNCIL VISITS KOSOVO

PRISTINA -- The Security Council - on the first-ever mission of all 15 members - completed a two-day visit to Kosovo with an appeal to both Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb leaders to shun extremism and commit all efforts to building a multi-ethnic society.

"The communities should look toward the future," Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury of Bangladesh, who led the Council delegation, told a press conference Sunday. "They should not be pulled back by their past, but to organize their lives for peaceful co-existence. And so the healing process should start immediately."

Ambassador Chowdhury noted that the Serb community was particularly concerned about security, saying that displaced Kosovo Serbs would not be able to return home unless their security was ensured.

The issue of missing and detained persons came up during discussions as a priority concern of the Council, he said, adding that the delegation would take up the matter with President Vojislav Kostunica on Monday when they travel to Belgrade.

Another strong message the Council had repeated throughout its visit was the importance of the participation of the Kosovo Serbs in the November 17 elections and in the interim institutions to be created. Ambassador Chowdhury said he welcomed President Kostunica's encouragement to the Serbs to register for the elections and would seek his support again Monday.

Shortly before the press conference Sunday, the delegation held a hastily-scheduled meeting with Russian Federation President Vladimir V. Putin, who had made a surprise visit to Kosovo from Belgrade to review the 3,000-strong Russian contingent at Pristina airport.

The Council members and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo Hans Haekkerup had full and frank discussions with President Putin on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1244, which established the UN presence in Kosovo in June 1999, the upcoming elections and security concerns.

Earlier Sunday, the Council mission travelled to the divided city of Mitrovica by KFOR helicopters and met with representatives of the Kosovo Albanian and Serb communities in back-to-back meetings. The Council urged both communities to reach out so their efforts can jointly contribute to the future of Kosovo.

In Pristina, Ambassador Chowdhury also met with human rights activist Flora Brovina and other members of the Kosovo Albanian community representing those who have been detained in Serbia or missing. A delegation handed him a petition, a memorandum on the situation and photographs of victims and missing. Ambassador Chowdhury promised to raise the matter in Belgrade.

The Council members then met with the four Kosovo members of the Interim Administrative Council and selected members of the Kosovo Transitional Council -- the two Kosovo advisory bodies to the UN mission in Kosovo -- to hear the views of the various communities they represent.

The mission began on Saturday afternoon with a briefing by the Special Representative and other senior UN mission officials during which they heard the progress made as well as the challenges ahead for the United Nations.

After a meeting with the Momcilo Trajkovic, the head of the Yugoslav Committee for relations with the UN mission, the Council called for the full, effective and wide participation of the Serbs in the elections.

The Council attended a briefing and had discussions with KFOR Commander Lt. Gen. Thorstein Skiaker. A visit to Kosovo's largest prison had to be cancelled because of the meeting with President Putin.

The delegation's last meeting scheduled in Kosovo was to be with a group of women human rights activists including Ms. Brovina. The Council members leave for Belgrade early Monday.