

'Fabric of society' at risk in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Security Council told

With elections looming, tensions across Bosnia and Herzegovina are rising alongside inflammatory rhetoric against the country's long-standing peace agreement, a senior figure monitoring its implementation has warned.

Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the Security Council on Tuesday that the situation was being heightened by a "general trend" towards stockpiling weapons across the Balkan state.

"I am deeply concerned by the recent readiness among some politicians to refer to the possibility of a renewed conflict, including controversial statements by senior Bosniak politicians suggesting that a rearming effort was underway to 'respond' in case of a hypothetical war," said Mr. Inzko.

At the same time, senior Republika Srpska officials were also resorting to violent rhetoric, denying the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina and advocating for eventual secession, he added.

"Public comments were also made, glorifying convicted war criminals and calling for the return of an Republika Srpska army."

There needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country – *High Representative Valentin Inzko*

Mr. Inzko warned that some Croat officials have "mused" about the territorial reorganization of the country and threatened the dissolution of the state if the current electoral issues are not resolved to their satisfaction.

"Bosnia and Herzegovina is a single, multi-ethnic, sovereign state, consisting of two entities, in which all citizens – the three constituent peoples and others – live and work together, and elected officials above all have a responsibility to contribute to peace and reconciliation," stressed the High Representative, urging all public figures to choose their words more carefully and responsibly.

Progress cannot be taken for granted

In his briefing, High Representative Inzko said while the country has made significant strides since the end of the war in 1995, the progress cannot be taken for granted.

"The risk is that this divisiveness and sense of unease about the future of the country slowly seeps into the fabric of society," he said, urging the

international community to increase efforts to promote reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and across the region.

“Beyond this, there needs to be a change in the way politics is conducted within the country. It needs to come from the politicians themselves, but we as an international community, individually and collectively, have an interest in encouraging this change.”

The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an ad hoc international institution responsible for overseeing implementation of civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that saw thousands killed in fighting.

In addition, the conflict witnessed widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity and necessitated the setting up of a special international court, the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to prosecute those accused.

ICTY concluded its work in December last year, having heard the testimony from nearly 5,000 people and sentencing 90 individuals for their crimes.