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Statement by Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on his visit to the region of the Western Balkans

(Sarajevo, 12 February 2018) – United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng concluded today a twelve day visit to the region of the Western Balkans. The visit included Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In these four States, the Special Adviser met high level government officials, including cabinet members, heads of parliament and national prosecutors, religious leaders, representatives of civil society organizations as well as members of the diplomatic community. Special Adviser Dieng also held meetings with representatives of the United Nations Country Teams in the region and the United Nations Office in Belgrade.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he placed a special focus in light of the upcoming October 2018 general elections and the increase in political tensions, the Special Adviser met government officials at State and entity levels in Sarajevo and in Banja Luka. They included, among others, members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency (Ivica Dacic and Zeljko Krbavac); Minister of Foreign Affairs Gordan Jirasek; Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Borivoje Samardzija; Republika Srpska entity President Vukobrat Djodjic; and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity President Bakir Izetbegovic. He also met members of the Speaker's Collegium of both parliamentary chambers. Special Adviser Dieng paid tribute to the victims of past atrocity crimes with visits to memorial sites in Srebrenica and in Duga Gradina. He also visited the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar.

In the four States, the Special Adviser explored existing challenges for reconciliation as well as opportunities to overcome them. He expressed concern at the presence of a number of factors that could lead to scenarios of further polarization unless serious and concerted efforts are taken to address them, primarily by political leaders but also by civil society actors and by the international community. Concerns include political polarization across identity lines and politicization of events in the past, including glorification of war criminals, contestation of court decisions and limited engagement in transitional justice and national reconciliation. He also expressed concern at the absence of shared narrative of events in the past and what he considered as limited political interest in promoting such understanding.

Special Adviser Dieng called on political leaders to take active steps to overcome divisions and to normalize common ground. He specifically encouraged them to overcome existing trust deficits by focusing on the future and by prioritizing reconciliation as a fundamental policy objective for the region. This includes strengthening efforts to advance transitional justice and accountability agendas by expediting implementation of legislation addressing genocide denial, glorification of war crimes and hate speech, as well as by harmonizing domestic provisions on civilian victims of atrocity crimes, among others. He appealed for recognition of the suffering of all victims irrespective of their ethnic or religious origin, including through joint participation by political leaders in memorialization events. He praised the courage of victims' associations in advancing accountability in the region. He also underlined the important role of religious leaders and actors

