

needed to focus on coming forward with realistic and far-sighted proposals in the status process, for the future of both Serbia and Kosovo.

For the Serb community in Kosovo this means engaging in the status process and shaping their long-term future in Kosovo. Kosovo Serb political representatives should develop their own distinct political space, separate to that of Belgrade, to enable them to focus on their own needs. The status process should also focus on issues of real interest to the Serb community such as health, education, de-centralisation, cultural and religious heritage.

The sooner the Kosovo Serb community, and Belgrade, come to realise that the settlement needed to be acceptable to the majority of people in Kosovo, the quicker the status process would proceed. The reality was that 90% of Kosovo's population no longer wanted to be ruled by Belgrade or have any link with Serbia. This hard fact could not be overlooked or wished away.

This was the line John Sawers took in public briefings during his recent visit to Belgrade and Pristina.

Did the FCO Political Director indicate he was speaking on behalf of the Contact Group?

No. At each of the meetings John Sawers held with Albanian and Serb interlocutors, in Pristina and Belgrade, he noted he was visiting in his national capacity as Political Director and at the behest of the British Foreign Secretary, to follow up the Contact Group Ministerial held in London on 31 January.

What did John Sawers say publicly during his visit?

In Pristina John Sawers drew attention to the 31 January Contact Group statement – the status process would have an outcome which should be concluded during 2006 and be acceptable to the majority of people living in Kosovo. The vehicle with which the Kosovar Albanian people could achieve their stated aspirations was through the implementation of UN standards.

Outreach to Kosovo's minority communities on issues such as de-centralisation, cultural and religious heritage should be reinvigorated to support their political goals. The Kosovar Negotiating Team should also be generous on issues relevant to minorities in Kosovo.

In response to questions from the media, John Sawers said that independence was indeed an option – some would say the only option. The situation in Kosovo was a legacy of the Milosevic era: violence; ethnic cleansing; the failure of the Rambouillet Conference and the conflict in 1999. The future status process would need to reflect this reality.