

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
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For Immediate Release

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT
ON COMMISSION ON THE MISSING

I am pleased to announce today the formation of an international Blue Ribbon Commission on the Missing in the former Yugoslavia, with former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance as its chairman. The Commission will be made up of distinguished members of the international community.

Uncertainty about the fate of the missing is a source of anguish for their families and a cause of tension between the parties to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Only a handful of the nearly 12,000 missing-person cases thus far certified by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been resolved to date. This initiative will help to promote a full and timely accounting of the missing.

The new Commission will work closely with representatives from the United Nations, the ICRC, the Office of the High Representative, Physicians for Human Rights and other organizations to accomplish its primary task: to secure the full cooperation of the parties to the Dayton Peace Agreement in locating the missing from the four-year conflict and to assist them in doing so. This initiative aims to support and enhance the work of the ICRC and the Office of the High Representative, which have exerted significant effort and leadership in dealing with this very difficult issue.

The Commission will encourage public involvement in its activities and will take firm steps to see that the parties devote the attention and resources necessary to produce early, significant progress on missing-person cases. It will also reinforce efforts to ensure that exhumations, when necessary to identify the fate of missing persons, are conducted under international supervision and in accordance with international standards. In addition, the Commission will facilitate the development of an antemortem data base to support exhumation efforts.

In the longer term, and with the help and guidance of affected families, the Commission will work to develop appropriate expressions of commemoration and tribute to the lost and the missing, and to their loved ones.

Although the Commission will be an international effort, the United States will make a start-up contribution of two million dollars.

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