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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ROUNDTABLE ON FIREARMS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION
Thursday, 08 May 2008 at the 'Hotel M' – Belgrade, SERBIA**

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), is hosting a Roundtable on Firearms and Domestic Violence Legislation in Serbia for Government and Civil Society Representatives.

The event will be opened by **Mr. Lance Clark, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Serbia**, and participants will subsequently be addressed by **Ms. Natalija Micunovic, Assistant Minister of Labour and Social Policy (Gender Equality Department)**; **Mr. Miroslav Vasin, the Provincial Secretary for Labour and Gender Equality with the Executive Council of Vojvodina** and **Ms. Vesna Nikolic Ristanovic, the Director of the Victimology Society of Serbia**.

In 2007, SEESAC commissioned research on Firearms *Possession and Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans*, which resulted in a comparative overview of legislation and implementation mechanisms in the Western Balkans countries. Although throughout the region considerable progress has been made in relation to developing specific legislation against domestic violence as well as legislation pertaining to weapons possession, the study has identified that domestic violence continues to be a widespread problem and data shows that the prevalence of weapons use in these cases is very high.

Research in Serbia revealed several areas for improvement in the current legal framework and subsequently a proposal for changes of three Serbian laws has been drafted. Changes to the Law on Weapons and Ammunition, Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code would ensure greater protection of victims in Serbia in the future. The proposed changes range from introducing obligatory medical exams in the weapon licence issuance process to increasing the minimum and maximum penalties for criminal offences of domestic violence within the Criminal Code and including domestic violence in the list of offences that constitute refusal of a firearms licence application.

The goals of the Roundtable are therefore to;

1. Present the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the research;
2. Present and discuss the draft proposals for legal changes to relevant legislation related to firearm possession and domestic violence.

The Roundtable will give an opportunity to identify additional priorities for Serbia in terms of implementing recommendations from the research on firearms and domestic violence, and will provide an opportunity to share information on relevant strategy and policy developments.

Available data from existing research suggest that domestic violence is the most widespread form of violence throughout the region, and that women are the primary victims. Surveys, conducted mostly by women's NGOs, suggest a high level of unreported cases of domestic violence, due to existing gender prejudices that discourage women from reporting domestic violence, and the lack of safe and prompt access to justice. Furthermore, research shows that victims usually seek help only after being exposed to violence for long time periods, and after receiving physical injuries. In a post-conflict situation, the response to domestic violence must address the issue of small arms and light weapons control in policies, strategies and measures aimed at prevention and protection of victims.

For more information on the event, please contact the SEESAC Communications Officer, Ms. Ana Martinovic at: 011- 344 6353 or ana.martinovic@undp.org