

Humanitarian Mine Action Progress Under the Mine Ban Treaties

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I would like to thank the Republic of Croatia and our gracious hosts the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Thanks also to the Croatian Mine Action Center [CROMAC] and the Croatia Without Mines Foundation. I particularly want to recognize Mr. Otto Jungwirth, the Deputy Director of CROMAC, Mr. Branko Bosniak of Croatia Without Mines, and the fine team of individuals who organized this Conference.

I welcome the distinguished panelists, each of whom is among the world's leading experts in humanitarian mine action. I thank and welcome all those who traveled here to the beautiful Dalmatian Coast. I look forward to hearing from you in order to recognize the achievements and absorb the lessons learned in humanitarian mine action here in the Balkan region.

All of us here are connected by a shared desire to end the threat of landmines around the globe, and help the survivors and their societies lead productive lives, unburdened of the danger of landmines.

Some of you have been involved in, and committed to, mine action for a long time; others may be newer to this calling.

For my part, I had the good fortune of knowing and working with the co-founders of the [Landmine Survivors Network](#) [LSN], Jerry White and Ken Rutherford, as a founding board member starting in the mid-1990s. I watched LSN quickly become a force for good in the lives of many people in need on several continents, including here in the Balkans, in a project funded by the U.S. Department of State.

When I joined the Bush Administration as part of Secretary Powell's team at the State Department in 2001, I was honored to be given an additional role as Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action. I am here today because the United States cares a great deal about recovery from war in the Balkan region.

Our mine action programs are designed to prevent further casualties, to help survivors reclaim productive and fulfilling lives, and to return mine-infested lands to productive use.

The U.S. Government is very active around the world and here in the Balkans. I am hopeful it will be possible to support even greater mine action efforts in coming years. Since 1996, the U.S. has provided over \$70 million to support mine action programs in Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Macedonia. I appreciate and wish to acknowledge the very important and substantial contributions made by other donors to support mine action and post-conflict initiatives throughout the region.

The very positive impact that these initiatives have had has been greatly facilitated by the role of the [International Trust Fund for Demining and Victims' Assistance](#) [ITF]. The ITF has accelerated the progress of mine action in South Eastern Europe by serving as the coordinator of choice for many donors to Balkan mine action. The U.S. is a proud partner of the ITF and I would like to recognize and thank all the countries, both donors and recipients, who have worked with each other to make the ITF a successful symbol of international cooperation.

In its first year, 1998, the ITF received donations totaling \$2.9 million to support mine action projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The success of these initial efforts allowed the fund to expand considerably so that today it addresses landmine problems in all of the countries in the region, and is assisting in the Caucasus. To date, the ITF has raised over \$101.6 million to support mine clearance and survey, survivors' assistance, and mine risk education programs, as well as supporting initiatives to enhance information management and regional cooperation.

Later you will have the opportunity to hear about the fund's wide-ranging activities from its director, Mr. Jernej Cimpersej. Right now, however, I would like to focus on two very specific and significant accomplishments. Since 1999, projects funded through the ITF have resulted in the clearance of over 31 million square meters of land, treatment and rehabilitation of about 540 mine victims, and the destruction of over 30,400 mines and unexploded ordnance. These are truly impressive figures.

And while these past accomplishments are significant, we must keep our eyes toward the future and the challenges that lie ahead. The legacy of the war in the Balkans has many aspects. The dangers of landmines are a major factor standing in the way of a full recovery for the peoples of the Balkan region. The harm to civilians is the most urgent and compelling problem. The rendering of agricultural land unusable is another major impediment to restoration of prosperity. The fear of landmines stands in the way of the return of populations displaced by conflict. These conditions are obstacles to political stability.

One of the themes of this conference is to recognize the tremendous efforts and accomplishments by the Croatian authorities, the neighboring governments and mine action organizations, and their public and private international partners. It is true that the accomplishments to date are significant, but I would suggest to you that our greater challenge may lie ahead.

How do we ensure that international donors maintain their interest and commitment to a region that is becoming a success story, when so many mine-affected countries are in desperate need of resources?

The answer, I believe, must be to show a clear vision of what we all plan to accomplish in the next few years. The Balkans can become – and I would suggest, must become – a model of professionalism, coordination, and maintenance of standards, transparent and clearly accountable processes for qualifying projects, selecting remediation strategies and disbursing funds.

I see a very positive evolution in Balkan mine action. Look how much the structure of cooperation and management has developed in a very few years. We are seeing a parallel evolution in the donor community, where private individuals, organizations and businesses are looking for effective ways to help.

Above all, let us remember that the mine problem in the Balkans is a humanitarian crisis. The challenge is to achieve security, economic vitality and political stability.

There is a strong foundation of support for mine action in South Eastern Europe. I look forward to working with many of you in this growing collaboration between mine action organizations and partners around the world so that we may reach the goal, in Croatia and the Balkans, to render the region mine-safe, to reintegrate the survivors to their societies, to make fertile lands productive, and thereby to build a stable peace where all can reach their human potential.

Thank you.

[End]