



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Albanian Mine Action Programme Update to Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies- 22 June 2004

Mr Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Albanian Government and the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE), I am very pleased to have the opportunity to provide this national update on Albanian Mine Action Programme.

The mines and UXO threat in Northeast Albania emanated from the Kosovo conflict in 1999 year. It includes 120 km borderline in the Northern part of Albania, up to 20 km inside Albania. After the Albanian Armed Forces' (AAF) Level One Survey in 1999, 102 contaminated areas were identified, representing 15,250,000 m². The threat includes AP and AT mines. An added complication is that no records of minefields are available to Albania. Since 1999, 32 people have been killed and 217 injured from mines and UXO.

First commitment of the Albanian Government toward the mines/UXO problem is the clearance of the so-called 15 "hotspots" created during the emergency of 1997 in Albania. At least 15 Government ordnance depots were destroyed and looted countrywide, leaving tons of dangerous munitions scattered around, threatening the lives of civilians.

After the Kosovo crisis in 1999, the Albanian Government responded swiftly in conducting rapid surface clearance, which drastically reduced civilian casualties. This was, however, not done according to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and all the areas have to be re-cleared. Shortly after that, the AAF conducted a Level 1 Survey, which indicated virtually the total border area to be contaminated.

Albania has ratified both the AP Mine Ban Treaty and the Amended Protocol II to the CCW Convention. Towards the end of 1999 the Albanian Government decided to adopt IMAS and established a structure to implement humanitarian mine action. In order to adequately coordinate mine action, an inter-ministerial body - the Albanian Mine Action Committee (AMAC) - was formed in October 1999. This body is the overall executive and policy - making body for mine action. At the

same time, an operational body - the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE) - was established to carry out the mine action programme under direction of the AMAC.

Albania ratified the Ottawa Treaty on 29 February 2000 and the Stockpile Destruction Project commenced on 15 January 2001 with Canada as major donor. Demilitarisation was based on reverse assembly and recycling was a major aspect. The last anti-personnel mine (APM) of 1,683,860, was demilitarised on 4 April 2002, 2 years ahead of obligatory period in terms of Ottawa Convention.

Albania has made a considerable progress in the removal of mines from its territory. Today remain less than 6 million square meters of the original of 15.25 million square meters of contaminated area. Albania is applying an integrated humanitarian mine action plan, incorporating advocacy, demining, mine risk education, the physical rehabilitation of mine victims, as well as their socio-economic reintegration into society.

Albania has developed its Mine Risk Education Strategy to prevent all mine incidents in Northeast Albania. A UNDP capacity building programme commenced in April 2002 which is being funded by UNDP, US State Department through ITF, DFID and Canadian Government. AMAC is assisted in the formulation of policy, strategy, a national mine action plan and priorities for mine action while assistance to AMAE entails the establishment of a sustainable structure capable of coordinating all mine action in Albania.

To this effect, the UNDP has employed three technical advisors: one Chief Technical Advisor, an in-kind Operations Advisor from the Swiss General Staff and a Survivors Advisor/UN Volunteer. A fully functional AMAE has been established with UNDP, EU and ITF assistance, including an integral quality management (QM) Section with a regional office in NE Albania. A complete set of AMAE Technical & Safety Standards (TSS's), based on IMAS (International Mine Action Standards) has been introduced.

From 2000 to 2003, various demining organizations RONCO, HELP, Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD), and Danish Church Aid (DCA-Act) have been present in Albania conducting demining operations and approximately 10 million m² of formerly contaminated land has been released through survey and clearance by these organizations during this period. In 2004, there are two demining organizations (DCA-Act and Handicap International) deployed in Northeast Albania conducting respectively demining operations and technical survey. The aim of the Technical Survey Project executed by Handicap International will be to accurately delineate all of the minefields and battle areas in North East Albania and the technical survey organization will be converted into a national demining organization in 2005.

The Technical Survey Project is suspended since the fatal accident of May 24th 2004, where a cluster bomb exploded during a training session that Handicap

International was delivering to the new recruited deminers. Out of 36 people present in the classroom, two died immediately and 15 other trainees were injured. A Board of Inquiry has been established by AMAE to investigate the fatal accident. The Albanian Ministry of Defence made possible the evacuation of the victims to Tirana Hospital. Assistance has been provided to the victims' families by UNDP, AMAE and Handicap International including a charity bank account opened in their support. This latest tragedy is yet another painful reminder of the continued threat posed by mines and unexploded ordinance (UXO) in Northeast Albania.

The Albanian Government has also prepared a draft plan in compliance with the Article 5 of Ottawa Convention, which is being presented to the Geneva Intersessional Meeting at the table behind this room.

Concluding, on behalf of the Albanian Government I would like to thank the previous and current donors to the Albanian mine action programme including UNDP, EU, UK/DFID, ICRC, US State Department through ITF, Canadian, Czech Republic, Danish, German, Italian, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Swiss and Turkish Governments. Without their assistance we would not be able reach our final goal- to set Albania free of mine by 2007.

Thank you very much for your attention!!