



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

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REVIEW OF THE STATUS AND OPERATION OF THE CONVENTION

NAIROBI, 02.12. 2004

Mr. Chairman of the Conference, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

Firstly I would like to thank Austrian Presidency and Kenyan hosts of this conference for their excellent preparations and warm hospitality.

Thank you as well for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the Albanian Government on the progress that Albania has made in meeting the obligations deriving from the Ottawa Convention.

It was 29 February 2000 when Albania ratified the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty.

As part of these commitments, I'm pleased to report again that Albania has destroyed all its stockpile of anti-personnel mines. The APM Stockpile Destruction Project was implemented under the NATO PFP Trust Fund with Canada as the major donor. Demilitarisation was based on reverse assembly and recycling was a major aspect of the project. The last APM of about 1,7 million was demilitarized on 4 April 2002, 2 years ahead of obligatory period in terms of Ottawa Treaty.

Another problem Albania is striving to address is the clearance of mined/UXO contaminated areas in Northeast of the country. These mined areas are legacy of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 where more than 15 million m² in the border line between Kosovo and Albania up to 20 km inside Albania were contaminated, by directly impacting on more than 25,000 people in 39 villages.

From 1999 to date, 34 people have been killed and 235 injured by this threat and many families, already desperately poor, lost all of their means of income and even livelihoods. This contamination furthermore seriously inhibits the area development and in a regional context it is a serious obstacle to the Albanian efforts for an effective border management as a prerequisite for the integration of Albania into the European Union.

To deal with this problem, towards the end of 1999, the Albanian Government adopted humanitarian mine action standards and established the national structures, including the Albanian Mine Action Committee (AMAC) as the policy making body and the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE) to adequately coordinate and monitor the mine action activities in country.

In April 2002, UNDP commenced a capacity building programme which has been generously funded so far by UNDP, US State Department through International Trust Fund (ITF) in Slovenia, DfID and the Canadian Government.

To this purpose, with the UNDP technical assistance a fully functional AMAE has been established. A Regional Office in North East Albania with an integral Quality Management Section capable to conduct Quality Assurance and Quality Control operations has been also set up with the support of US State Department through ITF. A complete set of AMAE Technical & Safety Standards based on International Mine Action Standards has been introduced. A functional Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Cell has been set up since 2003 with ITF and Swiss assistance.

The National Mine Action Strategy and the relevant Mine Action Plan, originally formulated in 2002, have been recently revised and our strategic objective is to render Albania Mine Safe by 2006.

From 2000 to now about 11 million m², which is more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total contaminated area have been released through clearance and surveys by various international demining organizations under the supervision of the AMAE and support from UNDP, the European Commission, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America through the International Trust Fund.

A particular care has been also dedicated during the implementation of the Albanian Mine Action Programme to the mine and UXO survivors. A national strategy for victims assistance has been adopted and several projects are

currently ongoing to assist the physical treatment and rehabilitation of the mine survivors as well their reintegration into the community. Through intensive mine risk education activities our challenging objective is to reduce the mine and UXO fatalities to zero.

Honored Participants,

I use this opportunity to encourage armed groups to renounce the use of land mines.

We encourage also Regional cooperation and in this regard we fully support the Initiative of Austrian and Slovenia for SE Europe Region "Free from Mine by 2009"

Despite various challenges, the day when Albania can be declared safe from mines and UXO is not far anymore. However this cannot be achieved without the support of our donors and loyal partners therefore by guaranteeing in the mean time the full commitment and an increased responsibility of the Albanian Government to resolve this problem my appeal to all of you today is: Continue to be with us, so together we can ensure a safer and better place for our people.

Thank you for your attention.