

Remarks by U.S. Ambassador Joseph A. Mussomeli
Opening of the 4th Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR)
Workshop
May 24, 2011, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Good morning. I'd like to thank our colleagues on the RASR Steering Committee for holding this workshop in Slovenia. And I'd also like to thank ITF for arranging this workshop, and the Slovenian Ministry of Defense for inviting the participants to visit some of their facilities. This will enable participants to observe best practices regarding the safe destruction of excess munitions.

Finally, I appreciate everyone's attendance and willingness to put aside your important duties to travel here. Of course, this really isn't such a sacrifice given where we are holding this conference. You would have a hard time finding another locale anywhere quite as lovely and enjoyable as Slovenia. But there is no reason that serious work cannot be done in a pleasant environment.

And this is serious work. As you know, South East Europe is burdened with aging and unstable stockpiles of weapons and munitions. And as you also know, these stockpiles pose two threats: illicit proliferation and accidental explosion.

These threats could cause - - and in some cases have caused - - humanitarian disasters and political crises in several countries. Here in Europe, ammunition stockpile explosions in Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia resulted in large numbers of casualties.

These two threats are why RASR was created and why we are here today: to speak frankly and honestly about these dangers with each other.

Let me comment briefly on the role of the United States in stockpile reduction. Since the mid 1990's, the United States has invested millions of dollars to reduce excess, unstable, and loosely stockpiled conventional weapons and munitions.

Already the United States has helped Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Macedonia, and Montenegro. We helped Hungary to destroy excess man-portable air defense systems back in 2005. We continue to assist Albania, Bosnia, and Montenegro in destroying their excess munitions, and are also preparing to help Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania.

All of the countries represented here are allocating resources to deal with this problem. But over the years it has become clear that problems affecting several

countries in the same region can be confronted more effectively and solved more quickly if the countries work together. That is why the United States supports a long-term, coordinated, regional approach.

What we do not seek to do is to create a new regional bureaucracy. No sane person in this room wants more bureaucracy! Instead, we seek to foster relationships between senior military and Ministry of Defense officials across the region so that you can periodically share information, advice, and lessons learned, as well as improve coordination, when appropriate, to reduce and destroy stockpiles.

And so we have RASR. It has no formal dedicated staff. It has no permanent building. But it provides you with a neutral information exchange forum during the Workshops and, we hope, a permanent network of professional contacts with whom you can engage throughout the year in ongoing discussion and collaboration. And it has a great website too, which, contains more and more useful reference materials that are in regional languages and not just in English.

RASR is intended to save lives, and to reduce your countries' expenditures on stockpiling munitions that have become more of a danger than an asset.

The degree to which you participate today and tomorrow at this Workshop, and the extent to which you take advantage of the information and professional contacts that are gained will determine how successful all of us will be in reducing the hazards that are like time bombs in military depots throughout this region.

Thank you again for coming here and thanks to the RASR Steering Committee for arranging this Workshop. Work hard and good luck!

###