

THE ALBANIAN MINE ACTION PROGRAMME

Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to express our appreciation for this chance to inform you on mine action progress in Albania.

The Kosovo crisis left more than 15 million square meters of land in Northeast Albania contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). This in a region, which is probably one of the poorest in Europe and where poverty is exacerbated by the mountainous terrain and mines contamination. Approximately 120,000 people are directly or indirectly affected, while 39 villages are severally affected. Although this problem is geographically contained to Northeast Albania, it has a profound effect on these communities. A further serious concern is its effect on integrated border management in the region. It is virtually impossible to control the Albanian side of the border with Kosovo because of virtually continuous mines and UXO contamination.

Despite numerous other priorities, Albania responded to this crisis by rapid surface clearance to minimise civilian casualties, ratifying the important international treaties on the ban of landmines, creating a national structure for humanitarian demining and supporting all mine action efforts in Albania. An integrated National Mine Action Plan has been implemented and more than 9 million square meters of land has already been released back to the affected communities by the end of 2002.

Our mission is to free Albania from the effect of mines and UXO by 2005 and we will rely on our allies, as ever, to reach this goal.

Over to Mr. Swart now for further detail.