

**Remarks by U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Deborah Jones
Opening of the 5th Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR)
Workshop
April 24, 2012, Durrës, Albania**

Good morning distinguished guests and participants. Welcome to the 5th Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR) Workshop. I appreciate everyone's attendance and willingness to put aside your important duties to travel here.

I thank all of our colleagues on the RASR Steering Committee, as well as the International Trust Fund (ITF Enhancing Human Security), based in Slovenia, for arranging this Workshop. I also extend special thanks to Albania's Ministry of Defense for their role in enabling this particular Workshop to be held in Albania, and for permitting everyone to visit the ULP Mjebes demilitarization facility tomorrow.

Our colleagues at NATO's Maintenance and Supply Agency, which is working under a grant from the United States to help in the vital demilitarization of excess munitions at ULP Mjebes, also deserves our appreciation for their role in facilitating that visit.

By now, everyone here is well aware that South East European countries – and many other countries around the world – are burdened with aging, excess, and unstable stockpiles of conventional weapons and munitions. These stockpiles pose two serious threats: they are at risk of illicit proliferation and accidental explosion.

These threats have caused severe humanitarian disasters and political crises in countries around the world. Here in Europe, for example, ammunition stockpile explosions in recent years in our host country, Albania, as well as in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia have resulted in large numbers of casualties and significant damage, often displacing many civilians.

Those threats and tragedies are why RASR was created and why we are here today: to frankly discuss these dangers and work together to find solutions. And, in the context of *safe* demilitarization and *safe* destruction of excess stockpiles, to share best practices and lessons learned, and exchange information about national capabilities to reduce munitions stockpiles.

Let me comment briefly on the United States' role in stockpile reduction in this region. Since the mid-1990's, the United States has been a strong supporter of efforts to bring security and stability to Central and Eastern Europe. This includes investing millions of dollars in projects to reduce excess, unstable, and insecurely stockpiled conventional weapons and munitions.

Already the United States has helped Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, and Montenegro to destroy some of their excess small arms, light weapons - including in some cases MANPADS - and munitions. As we meet here today, United States' supported conventional weapons destruction efforts continue as I speak in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro. We continue to support the UXO clearance at the Chelopchene depot in Bulgaria as well.

Our efforts in this region are enabled not only by the essential friendly cooperation and contributions of the host governments, but also through our wonderful partnerships with the ITF, with NATO's Maintenance and Supply Agency, and with the U.S. Department of Defense's Threat Reduction Agency.

The countries represented at this Workshop recognize that they have a stockpile problem, and are allocating some of their own national resources to deal with that problem. Your presence here today is evidence of your government's commitment to solving that problem.

Over the years it has become clear that any great challenge affecting several countries in the same region can be confronted more effectively and solved even more quickly if the countries work together.

This desire for a coordinated regional approach is why we have RASR. It is designed as an inclusive forum for you to exchange information during the Workshops and, we hope, develop a permanent network of professional contacts with whom you can engage throughout the year in ongoing discussion and collaboration to advance stockpile reduction. RASR also has a great website, which contains more and more useful reference materials that are in regional languages and not just in English. In that regard, I would like to salute the Small Arms Survey, which in partnership with the United States and RASR Steering Committee maintains this website, and which has generated so many of the excellent studies and reports that are loaded on that site.

RASR, and these regularly-occurring Workshops, are intended ultimately to save lives, and to reduce your countries' expenditures on stockpiling munitions that have become more of a danger to your countries than an asset.

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