

**Remarks by Mr. Eugene S. Young, Deputy Chief of Mission
U.S. Embassy Ljubljana, Slovenia
Opening of the 6th Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR)
Workshop
April 4, 2013; Bled, Slovenia**

Good morning distinguished guests and participants. Welcome to the sixth Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR; pronounced “razor”) Workshop – the first such workshop to include several Deputy Ministers of Defense, to whom I extend a special welcome. 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, particularly ITF Enhancing Human Security (ITF), which handled all of the arrangements for this Workshop, and which currently chairs the RASR Steering Committee. For 15 years, ITF has worked to reduce the negative humanitarian impact of conventional weapons and explosive remnants of war first in Bosnia and Herzegovina and over the subsequent years throughout South East Europe and other countries. Congratulations on this milestone! I also extend special thanks to Slovenia’s Ministry of Defense for their role in enabling this particular Workshop to be held in beautiful Bled.

South East European countries – and many others– remain burdened with aging, excess, and unstable stockpiles of conventional weapons and munitions. Their warehouses are bulging with everything from assault rifles to man-portable air defense missiles (MANPADS), from hand grenades to fuel air explosive bombs. In some cases munitions are even stored in the open air where they are subject to even more extreme temperature ranges and storms. These stockpiles pose two serious threats: first, they are at risk of illicit proliferation; second, they can cause catastrophic unplanned explosions. These threats are not theoretical! “Dangerous depots” have already caused severe humanitarian disasters and political crises around the world. In this region alone since January 1998, there have been over 24 munitions stockpile explosions, including in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia, that have resulted in large numbers of casualties, significant damage, and displaced civilians. Distinguished guests, let me put it this way: *a great many of your munitions have become so old and unstable that they pose more of a threat to your own citizens and your own soldiers than they do to any potential enemy.*

Acknowledging these threats, diplomats, military officials and subject-matter experts gathered in Zagreb, Croatia for the 1st RASR Workshop in May 2009. In

the intervening years, RASR workshops in Budva, Montenegro; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ljubljana, Slovenia; and Durrës, Albania have brought together relevant, working-level figures to build local capacity to deal with excess munitions stockpiles, share best practices and lessons learned.

RASR has no formal dedicated staff, and no permanent building. Rather, it is a forum for open, friendly, and frank discussions on excess munitions stockpiles in South East Europe. RASR is led by its Steering Committee: ITF, Small Arms Survey, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the Center for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC), and the NATO Support Agency (NSPA), and enjoys partnerships with the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement and the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

Let me say a few words about my country's role in stockpile reduction in this region. Since the mid-1990s, the United States has invested millions of dollars to reduce excess, unstable, and insecurely stockpiled conventional weapons and munitions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, , Hungary, Macedonia, and Montenegro. As we meet here today, United States-supported conventional weapons destruction efforts continue in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. We also assisted in the clean up of unexploded ordnance when depots and munitions demilitarization sites had blown up. Last summer, we successfully completed the UXO cleanup project at the Chelopechene depot blast site in Bulgaria and concluded our assistance at the Gerdec disaster site in Albania.

None of our efforts in South East Europe would have been possible without the close cooperation and openness demonstrated by your governments. We thank you for *helping us to help you* make your countries and this region safer, and, by extension make the world safer.

Previous RASR workshops have focused on working-level discussions to develop solutions to the threats these munitions pose: 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. Now, for the first time, RASR attendees also include figures at the Deputy Minister of Defense level. This 6th Workshop has been specially designed to include strategic-level decision makers in these important conversations. We hope that, through this RASR Workshop, you will gain an appreciation of the

urgent need to address the threats these stockpiled munitions pose, and build relationships with your colleagues and counterparts throughout the region.

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. In the context of declining national budgets worldwide, it is even more important for countries to combine efforts. It is also our hope that you will return to your countries with an appreciation of the need for your Ministries of Defense to maintain adequate human and financial resources to properly secure your stockpiled arms and munitions and safely dispose of your excess items.

Thank you again for your participation. Good luck and work hard during this sixth workshop!