

Mr. State Secretary, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am really honoured that International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance has had the opportunity to co-organize this prominent event for the United Nations.

ITF has been a part of international efforts to eradicate problem of landmines in SE Europe for the past ten years and we are proud of the results achieved so far: more than 82 million square meters of land has been cleared, a thousand mine survivors have received rehabilitation assistance, and nearly 700 experts have been trained in the fields of mine victims assistance, demining and mine action management. Moreover, more than 120.000 children and adults have directly benefited from Mine Risk Education projects and a thousand mine survivors have participated in Mine Victim Assistance projects on a yearly basis. Regional body - South-East Europe Mine Action Coordination Council (SEEMACC) to enhance confidence building and cooperation among mine-affected countries from SE Europe has been established.

The most noteworthy achievement has been Macedonia, which already declared its 'mine-free' status, thus fulfilling its obligations under the Ottawa Convention. ITF is, on the other hand, fully aware of the reality that there is still a long way to go, especially if we consider things in a global perspective.

One of the most essential lessons learned during the 10 years of ITF existence lies is that, in order to be able to operate successfully within Mine Action environment, the support of the highest national levels both in a recipient country as well as in donor community is of utmost importance. Slovenia has stood firmly behind the ITF from the beginning.

With the sufficient support of all key actors on political, community and operational level, mine action processes are set on time, help is delivered where and when needed and projects are implemented in an efficient and effective manner. Equally important, through successful coordination of activities between donors and recipient countries, a duplication of efforts is avoided and maximum possible impact on the lives of affected individuals, their families and communities is achieved. Up to date, ITF has proven to be very capable in coordinating these activities, on behalf of its donors, with great success.

In South Eastern Europe, the success for efficient Mine Action Programmes also lies in the fact that governments of mine affected countries have realized that only with its full dedication, its own funding to the extent possible and embracing the ownership of their national mine action programmes can make the goal of mine free land happen.

The donor community on the other hand, recognizes such determination and is more confident in continuous support to mine action programmes.

Please allow me to express the ITF staff's satisfaction for the recognition of good work of ITF in the region of SE Europe, by other mine affected countries in need of assistance as well as by the donor community.

The result of such recognition has led to a signed partnership agreement between UNMAS and ITF, which outlines additional efforts within the field of Mine Action on the global level and ITF is more than willing and prepared to undertake this challenge.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends, let me conclude my remarks by thanking the UN, the Republic of Slovenia, Croatian Mine Action Centre and Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining for the cooperation and assistance in organizing this event. Personally and on behalf of ITF Team, I wish you success with your work over the next few days and in future.

Thank you!