

## Statement on North Atlantic Treaty Organization Operations in Southeast Europe

March 24, 2000

One year ago today, the 19 democratic members of NATO, supported by our regional partners, launched Operation Allied Force to put an end to Slobodan Milosevic's brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Milosevic's actions not only caused the worst human disaster in Europe since World War II but also threatened NATO's core interest in the stability of southeast Europe. As result of NATO's resolute and concerted stand over 78 days, we reversed the ethnic cleansing, compelled Serb forces to withdraw, allowed a NATO-led force and a United Nations mission to secure the peace, and paved the way for nearly a million refugees to return to their homes in safety. Imagine the consequences if NATO had not acted one year ago. Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing would have proceeded unchecked, exterminating or expelling hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians, a final grim epitaph of the twentieth century. Those who survived would have become permanent refugees, causing a humanitarian crisis and threatening the stability of the region. The historic progress we have made toward building a Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace for the first time in history would have been reversed, and NATO's role to help consolidate stability in Europe would have been undermined.

We should be proud that we met our responsibilities in Kosovo, and we have accomplished much in the past year. With the support of the international community, NATO and the United Nations Interim Administrative Mission have created the foundation that can lead to a peaceful and stable Kosovo. The U.N. mission helped return over 90 percent of the refugees to their homes in time to assist their preparations for winter. Some 300,000 Kosovar children are back in school today. Electric power has been restored to most areas. Over 200 kilometers of railway are back in service, and nearly

2,000 kilometers of roadways have been cleared of unexploded ordnance and mines. Although violence still remains too frequent in Kosovo, the weekly murder rate has been reduced by 90 percent since last June, thousands of weapons have been confiscated and destroyed, and the Kosovo Liberation Army was successfully disbanded.

There is much more to be done. The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), with approximately 85 percent of the troops contributed by our Allies, has helped create conditions of basic security that will permit civil implementation to move forward quickly. The international community has pledged over \$1 billion for the stabilization and economic revitalization of Kosovo—with our partners providing more than 6 times our contribution to this effort. U.N. member states have sent over 2,500 policemen to patrol the streets of Kosovo, but the U.N. has asked for an additional 2,000 officers, and we will do our share. Building on the foundation of the 300 local judges and prosecutors that have been appointed by UNMIK, the international community is working with Kosovars to help rebuild Kosovo's legal and judicial systems. With the support of international soldiers and police, we are working to protect the individual human rights and cultural heritage of all Kosovars, Serb, Roma, Albanian and others. We remain committed to seeking the release of those Kosovars jailed in Serbia without the benefit of due legal process.

During Allied Force, we persisted until we prevailed. Today, we are carrying that same spirit forward into the challenges of building peace, democracy, and opportunity—in Kosovo and across the Balkans. And with the leadership of our European allies and the support of our Congress, we will continue to work with the people of southeast Europe toward our shared vision of a democratic and peaceful future.