

**Statement by the Under-Secretary-General
for Disarmament Affairs
Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala**

Public Ceremony in Gramsh, Albania

Friday, 17 September 1999

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. This is a day for a unique celebration. And there is so much to celebrate. Individuals have made a choice between swords and ploughshares. A community committed to living in peace has freely decided to publicly destroy tools of violence. A government dedicated to democracy and improving the maintenance of law and order in the country has encouraged the voluntary surrender of weapons in the hands of its civilian population. A nation recovering from a trauma has remained steadfast in giving bipartisan support for retrieval and disposal of weapons which could be used for wrongful purposes. An international community willing to try out new approaches to involve civil societies in promoting societal resistance to violence has provided generous assistance in implementing an innovative experiment. The underlying message of the experiment is simple. Give a community a better chance for development and it would be willing to discard weapons. Raise a community's stakes in peace and it would be more determined to shun violence.

2. Fledgling democracies need consensus across party lines to create and nurse political institutions. By extending their support to the weapons for development approach, the district authorities of Gramsh and the national government of Albania have proved that they are genuine partners in promoting the well being of the people of Albania. I see this partnership as giving the world a hope that Albania will be an oasis of tranquillity leading to stability in the Balkans.

3. The Gramsh Pilot Project was conceived in and around the very ground on which, in a few minutes from now, we will witness a ceremony of symbolism: of destroying weapons; of building bridges and roads; of lighting lamps; and above all of a community taking charge of its destiny. The GPP sprang directly from the wishes of the people of Gramsh, in their language, without any intermediaries. At the invitation of the Government of Albania, I had the privilege to consult all the commune leaders in June of last year and to discuss matters with the village elders of Tunja through my colleague Swadesh Rana when she visited later in December. It was my assessment that given a choice between guns and community development, the people of Gramsh would opt for the latter. The fact that the people of Gramsh have demonstrated their choice is not merely a vindication of this assessment. It is a vindication

of the United Nations concept of human development being essentially an enlargement of people's choices. Permanent human security has been preferred over the temporary security that guns may offer.

4. Since it is my firm belief that weapons retrieval from civil society and community based developmental incentives would require a parallel process of implementation, I invited UNDP to be the DDA's partner on ground in carrying out the GPP. On every possible occasion since then, it has been our joint endeavour to generate political, logistical and financial support for GPP. Expectations have been raised and commitments continue to be made for swift progress of GPP by the Group of Member States Interested in Practical Disarmament. The Chairman of the National Steering Committee, Minister Demeti visited New York earlier this year and saw for himself the enthusiasm with which a crowded room of Interested Member States received his assessment of the tasks ahead of GPP.

5. The District of Gramsh has come very close to accomplishing what it set out to achieve just a little over a year ago. Thousands of weapons have been voluntarily surrendered and some of them will be symbolically destroyed. Since the beginning of the project, no homicides have been reported in Gramsh and the number of armed confrontations has fallen dramatically. Work has commenced on developmental activities that will give employment and generate income for the local population, particularly the youth who represent not only our hopes but also our investment in the future. I call upon them to put their shoulders to the wheels and earn the future they deserve: a future free of violence and full of economic opportunity. Their ability and wish to do so is already epitomised by the slogan they have created: "one weapon less is one life more".

6. Today I am here to salute the people of the District of Gramsh. Each one of them is a real hero of the Gramsh Pilot Project. Together they have established an example to be followed in the rest of Albania. I understand that a nationwide program of advocacy has already been started. My discussions in Tirana yesterday encourage me to believe that the expansion of GPP to other parts of the country would move more swiftly because some of the initial investment of time and energy required for an experimental project has already been made. The expansion of the project in Albania would have at least two distinct advantages. The widening frontiers of a violence-free climate would encourage greater investment in development activities. The demonstration of the Albanian Government's commitment to destroy collected weapons would strengthen the international community's willingness to make additional commitments of political, financial and logistical support. All this augurs well for the stability of the Balkans. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the international community to consider providing further support for the expansion of the weapons for development model to other parts of Albania. Indeed, an expansion of the pilot to other districts of Albania is dependent on the prospects of mobilizing resources, including the willingness of donors to provide funding for this purpose. A select number of countries have generously supported the Pilot Project. I look forward to their continued support, and to that of other donors, to help local communities in other parts of the country achieve greater security from the scourge of small arms.

7. My optimism on the spread-effect of the success of GPP extends farther than Albania. I believe that around the world, there are at least twenty other locations where the possibilities of recurring violence could be mitigated by offering the civilian population a combined package of improved citizen security,

voluntary weapons surrender and community based employment-creating and income-generating development incentives, particularly for the youth. I hope that the ceremony of today will be an invitation for others to try out what is being accomplished here.

Mr. President,

8. I wish to congratulate you for your leadership and personal involvement in the Gramsh Pilot Project and through you I wish to extend my deep appreciation to the Chairman of the National Steering Committee, the Mayor, the Prefect, Durim Hushi, the Police Commissioner, the Commune Leaders, the Village Elders, the NGOs and the media. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to United Nations, Ambassador Agim Nesho and his colleague Mr. Sokol Kondi have been a constant source of insight and understanding so necessary for the smooth implementation of GPP. My sincere thanks go to our partner on ground, the UNDP and its dedicated team of untiring staff in Albania led by Jan Wahlberg and Parviz Fartash and Soknan Han Jung at the Headquarters. I wish to pay a tribute to young Nora Kushti for her infectious enthusiasm in promoting advocacy through local participation. Special recognition is due for our enterprising project engineer, Ferdinand Bakalli, who has made a tremendous effort to ensure an early start up of the development works. Last, but not least, I would like to express my sincere thanks to those in the international community who have concretely supported and participated in the pilot project. I would like to mention in particular the UK, for putting at the disposal of the project a team of weapons disposal specialists, the Belgian and Norwegian Governments for their funding contributions, and the European Union for its commitment to support weapons collection and destruction. The courtesy and generosity of spirit with which you have received me and my colleagues has made the GPP an especially rewarding experience. I thank you.