

Unveiling of the Superman Comic
Book on the Dangers of Land Mines

in Kosovo

The White House

8/2/99

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

TRANSCRIPTION IN PROGRESS

**Unveiling of the Superman Comic Book
on the Dangers of Land Mines in Kosovo**

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
The White House
August 2, 1999**

Welcome to the White House. It's a great pleasure to welcome all of you here as we come together to mark the end of the conflict in Kosovo and the return of the refugees to their homes. But we're here as well to talk about the challenges facing the Kosovars, and the new role that we can all play as we begin to help them put their lives back together and rebuild their communities.

The victory in Kosovo has been a triumph of a united international community over the forces of inhumanity and hatred. And today, we will be hearing from some of those same partners who are now working very hard to make peace a reality—in the homes and fields and playgrounds of Kosovo.

I want to welcome all of you here, and to thank particularly Lt. General Michael Davison, director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency at DOD; Tehnaz Dastoor from UNICEF, who has just returned from Kosovo; and Jenette Kahn, president of DC Comics. I also want to welcome other key partners, including Ambassador Donald Steinberg from the State Department, who is now serving as special representative of the President and Secretary of State for Global Humanitarian De-mining; Assistant Secretary of State Julia Taft, who did such an excellent job of coordinating refugee relief; and Acting Administrator of AID, Hattie Babbitt, who visited the region numerous times as well.

We are also pleased to have with us the ambassadors from Macedonia and Albania, and member of Congress. I particularly want to thank Senator Leahy, who was unable to get here because of plane delays, but who has been one of the foremost advocates on behalf of de-mining. There are also representatives of NGOs, humanitarian groups, and other government agencies.

I think we can all be grateful that the images that we watched on our television screens—those haunting images of children and families being crowded into trains, of families being separated from their children, of refugees wandering through the landscape of desolation and despair, of people weeping as they were called unspeakable atrocities. And of the refugee camps I visited and spoke firsthand with people—the words, the images, the memories that I took back with me. I remember visiting in May with a 63-year-old woman who told me that she didn't know where her daughter and her grandchildren were. I only hope they have now been reunited along with all the other families that were separated.

Those heart-wrenching scenes and stories that we all can recall are being replaced with different images of hope and of a future that people will have to build together to achieve. We're pleased that there once again the sounds of children playing, that markets are reopening, the stores are being stocked, that many are returning from the places they had traveled around the world back to their homeland.

But as they return home, they do face some new dangers, including landmines. And helping them deal with that problem is why we are here today.

It is my pleasure today to introduce to you one of the newest members of our international humanitarian community: A hero who wears a red cape and has a large "S" emblazoned across his chest. Superman has been the beloved hero of America's children for generations – armed with special powers, and a big heart. Now he will be both a hero and a guide to the children of Kosovo – as he educates them about the dangers of land mines in these new Superman Mine Awareness Comic Books. As we speak, 500,000 of these comic books are being flown to Kosovo, to be distributed to children throughout their schools and communities.

And that is a very important thing to do because landmines pose particular threat to the citizens. About 200 mine and unexploded ordinance accidents have already occurred over the past six weeks – a problem that the Kosovars will face again and again, for at least the next five years. When I was recently in Slovenia, I visited the rehabilitation hospital there, meeting with the doctors and the nurses, the therapists, and others who work with the victims of landmines in Bosnia and other places in the world, but principally Bosnia. And I saw on a map, in very stark terms, how many landmines are still left in Bosnia. We know that in Kosovo it's going to be a very lengthy and dangerous mission to remove them. And in the meantime, we have to persuade people, especially children, to be very cautious.

These comic books are part of a larger educational campaign that includes posters, radio and television messages, CD-ROMS and dance and theater groups- anything we can imagine to get the word out.

The comic books are part of a model public-private partnership. DC Comics provides the art work and printing facilities; the Department of Defense supplies the funding and logistical support; and UNICEF, which helped get input about what needed to be in the comic books, from Kosovars themselves– will help with distribution.

As many of you know, the Superman comics we are unveiling today are the third in a series of comic books which have been distributed – first in Bosnia, then in Central America, and now to Kosovo.

I especially want to thank Jenette Kahn, president of DC Comics, who has been a driving force behind this unique humanitarian partnership. And I know that her father, who is with us today, Rabbi Benjamin Kahn, is I'm sure he must take great pride in the remarkable work his daughter is doing to help save innocent lives around the world.

As many of you also know, there are a number of other highly effective public/private partnerships aimed at ridding nations of the problem posed by landmines – including the "Adopt a Minefield" program – a project of the UN Association, the Humpty Dumpty Institute, and the UN Mine Action Service. So far, 30 minefields around the world have been adopted by school

children, churches, and private companies around the US. And I want to thank those of you, Ralph Cwerman and Bill Leurs for your commitment to extend this program to Kosovo.

Another partnership – the Canine Demining Corps – combines the efforts of the Marshall Legacy Institute, the US Humane Society, the UN Development program and DC Comics to purchase, train and deploy mine-detecting dogs around the world. These dog teams will also be used in Kosovo.

I have seen for myself the devastating effects of mines. I have seen it over many years. Recently in Slovenia, I watched as young men and women and even older adults worked to become rehabilitated after losing an arm or a leg, waiting for their prosthetic limbs.

While I was there, I was handed two different types of land mines. And I saw, as those of you already know, how small they really are, how easily they could be hidden in the grass, or on a playground, or in a house. So I want to thank all of you for helping to raise public awareness and helping to save lives – and limbs – of innocent people.

Many of you know very well that the challenge we face is going to be significant. Educating people about the land mines is just a part of meeting that challenge. We also have to rebuild homes, fix schools, and hospitals, and clinics that have been destroyed or damaged. Restore electricity, and water systems. And maybe most importantly of all –work to create the conditions for lasting peace, by promoting tolerance and mutual respect. And here again, I want to express my concern about the recent attacks and threats against other minority groups in Kosovo, and I want to reaffirm the President's and our government's commitment to helping build a Kosovo that will respect and preserve the rights of all of its people. I can't help but recall that ancient saying that in the land where an eye for an eye is the rule, the people are blind. And we have to do whatever we can to persuade those who feel that they had been oppressed and victimized not to return that in kind.

Since March of 1998, the U.S. government has provided more than \$291 million in humanitarian assistance for Kosovo. The United States was also pleased to participate in a recent donors conference in Brussels, at which 2.1 million more dollars was pledged for immediate humanitarian assistance. And the President, of course, just came back from a trip to Sarajevo.

While the European donors will provide the bulk of the funding for reconstruction – the United States will do its part as well, helping to provide food and shelter, as well as to clear land mines and unexploded ordinances. I'd like to mention that the United States does more, around the world, than anyone else by far, actually to clear landmines and to render them inoperable.

The United States, in cooperation with our European allies, also remains strongly committed to enhancing the stability of the entire southeastern European region. When the President met, in Sarajevo, with European leaders – including those from Southeastern Europe. He affirmed our nation's commitment to the themes of the Southeastern Europe Stability Pact: the promotion of democracy and human rights, and the implementation of the Dayton accords. He also announced key financing and private investment initiatives aimed at spurring investment and easing trade restrictions in the area.

Thanks to so many partners, many represented here in this room, we are making progress, but we've got to continue to work hard together, not only between governments, but with international relief agencies and other charitable organizations, and particularly with businesses and concerned citizens everywhere.

It is now my pleasure to introduce someone who has just returned from Kosovo –who can tell us about the recovery efforts there, and what she sees as the challenges facing us: Tehnaz Dastoor from UNICEF is part of the partnership that has created this comic book series. We're very grateful to her and to UNICEF. And I want you to join me in welcoming Tehnaz and thank her for being with us today.

(closing remarks)

Well, I want to be sure we get a picture of the people who were mostly involved in that and maybe Julia and Hattie and Secretary Steinberg and others of you can come up and we'll have a big joint picture up here so that everyone can see that Superman is on the job. But I do want to just end on a serious note and that is, Ambassadors, why don't you join us as well. But this is a project that does really represent, as Jeanette said, the best of a public-private partnership. We've been promoting so many of those in our country, both for domestic and international purposes. And we have to continue to do that. And that is why we're so pleased that all of you are here today, not only to help on this particular project, but in the future, to come up with new ideas and new ways of helping people here at home and around the world. I'm particularly pleased that you can see arrayed behind me just a few of the people who represent the kind of resources that are brought to bare to make this partnership work.

Thank you all very, very much.