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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
FOR THE SIGNING OF THE U.S.-BOSNIAN HOSPITAL PARTNERSHIP

Washington, D.C.

MRS. CLINTON: Good morning and please be seated and welcome to the White House. It is a privilege for me to welcome all of you to an occasion that represents a great deal of pride for the United States and promises so much hope for the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have many very special guests. I wish I could introduce and acknowledge each one of you individually, but let me at least mention Ambassador Albright who you will hear from shortly, Jill Buckley from USAID, Ambassador Alkalai from Bosnia. We also have the ambassador from Romania who is here with us as well. Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. We are pleased to have Senator Leahy and Senator Pell as well with us. Thank you. Carol Bellamy from UNICEF. Jim Smith from the American International Health Alliance. Congressman John LaFalce from Buffalo and I thank you, Congressman. The mayors of both Buffalo and Tuzla, thank you gentleman. Judy Collins, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. Sandy Reisenbach, the Vice-president of Warner Brothers and Janet Kahn from D.C. Comics.

Other people will be introduced as we proceed with the program but we are delighted to have so many of you here to mark this important step forward in the reconstruction and reconciliation effort in Bosnia. What we are doing today in announcing these two initiatives, is making clear the commitment that the United States, both its government and its people have to the government and people of Bosnia.

These projects are public-private partnerships that will lend American expertise, resources and technology to the people of Bosnia as they emerge from the darkness of war and conflict. These partnerships reflect America's long tradition of humanitarian assistance to friends in need -- and our nation's commitment to peace and democracy in the former Yugoslavia and around the world.

When I was in Bosnia earlier this year with my daughter, I was in Tuzla. I was not able to go into the city at

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that time which I had very much hoped to be able to do. But I was able, at the American base headquarters there in Tuzla, to meet with civilians -- Muslims, Croats and Serbs -- who described how years of wear and ethnic hatred had shattered their lives and the lives of their children.

I listened as men and women whose daily activities were routinely interrupted by sniper fire, mortar shells, and tragedy told me how they had survived.

I listened as mothers and fathers who worried about their children's safety because even the most inviting playgrounds and soccer pitches often concealed deadly mines told me how they and their children had been able to survive.

I listened as doctors and nurses told me what it was like to care for patients under bombardment.

And I listened to teachers who described what it was like to see their schools and libraries shelled, destroyed, seeing books and the opportunities for teaching disappear.

In listening to the people whom I heard from in Tuzla, I also heard in their voices their hope that there could be a better life and there could be once again, have a normal, peaceful existence.

Establishing peace is a critical first step in rebuilding civil society in Bosnia. Ensuring that peace can last -- and that democracy and tolerance and mutual respect can take root and flower -- is the next step, a step we are helping the people of Bosnia try to achieve.

Both of the initiatives that we announce today represent our belief that peace and democracy can last in Bosnia if the nation itself -- and the people's spirits -- are repaired.

The first initiative involves a man already known and loved by generations of American children. He doesn't need much of an introduction. He's "the Man of Steel," a man with special vision, special powers, and a big heart -- just the sort of person to spread the word about the dangers of land mines in Bosnia. I know when I left Tuzla and went out to two of our outposts, Camp Alicia and Camp Bedrock, I was shown examples of the equipment being used to help train those who were clearing mine fields and what our American forces were doing to help. The problem is enormous and this effort is attempting to draw children's attention to the dangers that still unfortunately exist.

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Thanks to a public-private partnership involving the Department of Defense; Ambassador Albright; UNICEF, Warner Brothers and D.C. Comics, Superman will bring a special message to Bosnia's children in a new comic book that warns about the dangers of land mines.

We all know that children cannot become happy, healthy and productive adults if their childhoods are scarred by fear and violence. Sadly, as Senator Leahy has reminded all of us time and time again, land mines continue to pose a threat to children in Bosnia and many other places around the world.

For this reason, UNICEF has launched an education campaign to foster awareness about land mines among children and civilians in Bosnia, which you will hear more about later.

The second project we are announcing today draws on the leadership and skill of medical professionals and community groups on both sides of the Atlantic.

Aware of the urgent health care needs in Bosnia, I called on USAID early last year to explore whether it would be feasible to establish a partnership between a Bosnian and an American hospital. I had already visited hospitals in Russia, Estonia, Ukraine and Belarus that had joined in partnerships with hospitals in our country. And in each instance, I could see the good that had come for people on both sides of that partnership through these shared ventures.

Today it is a special honor for me to be the host for you here at the White House for the signing of a new American Health Alliance Partnership between Buffalo, New York and Tuzla. This partnership will significantly improve the availability of care -- and the quality of care -- for tens of thousands of people in Bosnia, including thousands of children, women, and refugees.

Buffalo was selected after intensive competition, in part because the city had already established a relationship with the health care community in Bosnia.

Two years ago, Buffalo General Hospital and the State University of New York at Buffalo initiated an exchange program with Tuzla Clinical Center in Bosnia. Americans from Buffalo traveled to Tuzla and worked side-by-side with their Bosnian colleagues even in the midst of war and violence. They donated over \$1.5 million in supplies for use in Tuzla. And Bosnian physicians and nurses were invited to Buffalo for informal exchanges.

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Today's announcement could not be possible without the support of the city and citizens of Buffalo, the Department of Defense, and private companies in the United States. In particular, I want to commend Eli Lilly & Company, which has committed \$250,000 in donations for next year. And I also want to thank the mayors of Buffalo and Tuzla, who are with us today, for their strong support.

It is important to note that these vital projects are part of a broader, ongoing American effort to build democracy and restore civil society in Bosnia.

Earlier this year, representatives of dozens of non-governmental organizations came to the White House at my invitation to tell us about the work they are doing on the front lines in Bosnia to improve health care, education, and the environment and promote civic participation and human rights.

In August, eighteen educators from across our country visited the White House to tell me about their efforts to train teachers in Bosnia.

And just this morning I was able to meet with representatives of the Sabre Foundation, which is performing an invaluable service in helping to restock Bosnia's libraries with thousands of books and learning materials destroyed by war.

Already the Sabre Foundation has distributed nearly three million books valued at more than \$60 million in fifteen countries in the former Soviet bloc.

None of these ventures would be possible without support from the federal government, from non governmental organizations, and the private sector.

And we should be proud of these partnerships not only because of the help they will bring, but because they represent the best in America and the best in American values. We have often seen in the past that Americans have come to work on behalf of those in other countries often very far away to help build the capacity for people to promote their own futures, to become committed to a common good. I wish that all of us could have had the experience that some of us in this room have had in visiting Bosnia in the last few years. I cannot even express fully what that experience has meant to me and how proud I am of the work that is being done by many brave people in Bosnia and our American forces.

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When I visited with our American soldiers, one of them said to me as I was shaking hands along the line, that he hadn't been quite sure why he had been sent to Bosnia until he got there. He went on to tell me what it was like to help clear a field of mines so that a farmer could return to plant, or how a house that had been uninhabited would show signs of life because they would see a line of wash hanging outside or how all of a sudden they would hear the sounds of children playing where before there had only been silence.

They were proud of what they were doing in Bosnia and they were proud of the role that America is playing. I tell this because I want all Americans to share that pride and to support our efforts in Bosnia in working with the brave people and the government there as they attempt to rebuild their own future.

To all of you involved in the Superman comic book and the hospital partnership and many other important efforts underway in Bosnia, I thank you for your commitment, your compassion, and your faith that democracy and respect and tolerance among people can replace strife and hatred in that distant land. You are truly champions of peace.

This morning, we will hear first from our Ambassador to the United Nations. Madeleine Albright will tell us about the importance of the Superman land mine awareness project and how it will save lives and contribute to Bosnia's recovery. Following Ambassador Albright, Jill Buckley will fill us in on the hospital partnership. We will then be honored to hear from His Excellency Sven Alkalai, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Ambassador to the United States. At the conclusion of the program you will all witness the signing of the hospital partnership agreement, which will make the Buffalo-Tuzla partnership official.

It is now my pleasure to introduce a great public servant, a diplomat extraordinaire, and a woman who has devoted considerable time and energy to making the world safer, juster and more humane, my good friend, Ambassador Madeleine Albright.

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