CROATIA
PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh Session

First Committee

Statement by
Vice Skračić
Head of Section for Arms Control and Disarmament

United Nations, New York
October 3, 2002
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to this most important position. We also extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau. Be assured that you have our full support in the execution of your duties.

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia shares the opinion of those who have expressed concern over the present state of affairs in disarmament negotiations. The Conference on Disarmament, the only multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament, is once again deadlocked, negotiations on an implementing Protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention abruptly came to an end almost a year ago, while the chasm between the conflicting demands of not only the nuclear weapons states themselves, but also between nuclear to non-nuclear states, is becoming ever wider, even as the number of nuclear weapons possessing states is, albeit informally, certainly getting larger.

How are we to overcome these shortfalls we are faced with? Certainly a return to common goals and values is among that which is needed. Instead of sticking to entrenched positions, as has been the case in the CD for the last five years, we must see what is possible now, and trust in the hope that progress achieved will lead to further progress down the line. In short, we fear that if no concrete action is imminent in the foreseeable future, the threat of stagnation and backward momentum becomes ever more prominent.

For its own part, Croatia is continuously working toward the effective and timely implementation of all its international obligations. Croatia regularly reports to the UN register on conventional weapons here in New York. Recently, the Croatian Parliament ratified Amended Protocol II on mines and other booby traps and Protocol IV on blinding laser weapons of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW), and will be ready to submit its first report on Amended Protocol II by the end of this year.

At the Second Review Conference of the CCW Convention Croatia fully supported proposals for extending the scope of the Convention to internal conflicts by amending Article 1 of the Framework Convention, as well as supporting the establishment of an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts, with separate coordinators, to discuss ways and means to address the issue of Explosive Remnants of War and to further explore the issue of mines other than anti-personnel mines.

On these specific issues, Croatia distributed a position paper at the second meeting of the Expert Group in July this year. In short, on ERW issues, we support the principle for a systematic resolution to this humanitarian problem through the establishment of a legally binding instrument. Even though more work is certainly needed on issues such as definitions for an ERW, the role of international humanitarian law as relates to ERW as well as defining whose responsibility is it to warn the civilian population and to clean ERW's following a conflict, we believe that the time is ripe for us to proceed with a negotiating mandate on this issue. Clearing ERW's should be an indisputable humanitarian obligation, and therefore we will support moves toward to earliest possible conclusion of negotiations on this issue.
With regard to mines other than anti-personnel mines, Croatia still holds the position that mines other than anti-personnel mines do not present the same humanitarian problem that anti-personnel mines do. They are not deployed in the same quantities that APM's are and because of their size and material content are easier to detect. We support efforts in the framework of the Group of Experts to make all mines other than anti-personnel mines detectable, as well as raising the efficiency of self-deactivation/self-neutralization or self-destruction facilities in all mines other than anti-personnel mines, be it through a new or an existing legal instrument.

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia actively participates in the work of the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines, including through various formal and informal groups that operate within the scope of the Convention. At the Meeting of States Parties in September this year Croatia along with Australia passed on the Co-Chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction (Committee III) to Romania and Switzerland. We wish them every success in the coming year, especially at this crucial time when the first deadlines under Article IV of the Convention are about to expire. We thank States Parties for their decision to once again appoint us to another two year mandate of co-rapporteurship/co-chairmanship, this time in the Standing Committee for Victim Assistance. Moreover, Croatia also takes an active part in the informal exchanges of the Universalization Contact Group and Article VIII discussions on facilitating and clarifying compliance measures.

In regard to Ottawa Convention obligations, Croatia wishes to inform that it plans to fulfill its Article IV obligation to destroy its stockpiles of APL's on exactly October 23, 2002. The event will be commemorated and it is expected that many governmental and non-governmental observers will be present. Moreover, Croatia is planning to hold a Seminar on Humanitarian Mine Action: Progress Under the Mine Ban Treaties in Dubrovnik directly following the stockpile destruction event. This seminar will focus not only on international aspects such as Ottawa Convention implementation, including international and NGO cooperation along these lines, but also on issues such as the development of new methods and technologies for demining, financing of demining programs, as well as education and awareness raising. As the Ottawa Convention (Article V) provides that mined areas need to be cleared within a 10 year time span, we feel that this is an issue that needs constant attention.

We should also like to mention that the Croatian Mine Action Center (CROMAC) has been active in helping to develop International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), mainly in the field of general and humanitarian demining standards and guidelines.

Mr. Chairman,

As part of its national efforts on the Small Arms Convention, the Government of Croatia adopted a "Farewell to Arms" program, aimed at allowing its citizens the opportunity to return small arms and light weapons retained following the armed conflict in Croatia in 1991-95. Thus far, the initiative has proven to be highly successful, with over 1,639,000 mines and other explosive ordinance, 33,440 automatic and semi-
automatic fire arms, over 5,800 kilograms of military grade and other explosives and 3,750,000 pieces of ammunition of various caliber being handed over. The vast majority of the explosive ordinance and small arms/light weapons handed in have already been destroyed, under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Due to its success, the initiative has been extended to the end of December 2002.

On CWC implementation, Croatia successfully hosted three inspection visits by OPCW inspectors in the year 2000, and regularly reports under Article XI of the CWC on its national defense program against chemical warfare.

Croatia has added its support to the work of the OPCW by hosting a number of events. We hosted a World Congress on Chemical and Biological Terrorism in Dubrovnik in April 2001, which was a follow up to a symposium entitled "Chemical and Biological War without Chemical and Biological Weapons", held in Zagreb in October 1998, during which a military exercise and demonstration was conducted. In September 2002 Croatia hosted the latest joint OPCW event – the First International Assistance and Delivery Exercise (ASSASTEX) according to Article X of the CWC. We thank all those who participated in this exercise and hope that its conclusions and lessons learned shall go a long way to helping streamline response times and actions that may be triggered due to a possible activation of Article X of the Convention.

Also on CWC issues it is important to note that in September 2001 the Croatian delegation to the Conference of the OPCW Executive Council in The Hague proposed the inclusion in Articles I, VI and X of the CWC, regulations concerned with and aimed at minimizing the possible risks of attacks against declared facilities and chemical or other storage sites, with conventional weapons or in terrorist actions. While it is well known that international assistance under Article I, II, VI and X of the CWC can be provided in case of a chemical weapons attack, nothing in the provisions of these Articles provide for assistance to be given in case of a conventional weapons attack against a declared chemical (or biological) storage facility.

Croatia is also preparing an Agreement with the OPCW on providing a RBC unit – Radiological, Biological and Chemical Decontamination Unit – at the disposal of the OPCW, in line with Article X of the CWC (international assistance and protection) by the end of 2002.

Mr. Chairman,

Croatia was actively involved in the negotiations of the Ad Hoc Group of States Parties to the BTWC on an Implementing Protocol for the BTWC. At the Fifth Review Conference of the BTWC, Croatia supported the continuation of the work of the Ad Hoc Group, on the basis of the Ad Hoc Group Chairman's Composite Text on a future Protocol. Croatia expressed the opinion that a holistic approach was made with the presentation of the Chairman's Composite text of the future Protocol, which attempted to bring together the different compromise positions debated over and offered in the course of the Ad hoc Group's negotiations. Croatia extended the position that while work in several areas of the Composite text may still have been required, especially with regard to future inspections and visits, with stronger provisions for the protection of commercial property information needed, it nevertheless provided an excellent opportunity to move toward bringing negotiations to their desired result – the adoption of a new Protocol
whose primary goal was to ensure that biological agents are not used to the detriment of human kind.

Croatia shall with its partners work towards the successful conclusion of the reconvened Fifth Review Conference in November this year, including with the adoption of a strong Final Declaration. Also, Croatia has indicated that it shall unilaterally support US proposals on national implementation measures and legislation for BTWC implementation, although it shares the view of some other European delegations that this presents political, not legal obligations on states. For this reason Croatia prefers the resumption of negotiations for a legally binding implementation Protocol to the BTWC.

On nuclear issues, as a non-nuclear NPT State Party Croatia adds its support to the goals contained in the New Agenda Initiative. We believe that it is only right that other non-nuclear NPT State Parties should come together and call on nuclear weapons states to abide by the obligations they themselves have agreed to implement through the Non-proliferation Treaty. Croatia will be cosponsoring this resolution again this year, and calls on others to do the same.

Conversely, with regard to the question of the establishment of new nuclear weapon free zones, Croatia cannot and will not support the establishment of such a zone in Central and Eastern Europe without the support and consent of the countries from this region, which is far from the case at this point of time. We implore upon the sponsors of this initiative to undertake extensive consultations with the countries of this region before once again tabling an initiative that does not enjoy their support.

On peacekeeping, Croatia is in the process of preparing combat units, combat support units, national support for deployed units and combat service support, as well as engineering and sanitary units for future UN and NATO/PfP peacekeeping operations. These units should be in full readiness by the end of 2003. Currently, Croatia has one military police platoon fully trained and ready to participate in UN/NATO led peace support operations.

Croatia actively contributes to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) long-term missions in Albania, FYROM, Kosovo and Georgia by seconding staff, both from the governmental and non-governmental sector. Croatia plans to increase the number of its mission members in existing missions, as well as begin seconding officers in other missions.

Like other Central and Eastern European countries Croatia is preparing to downsize its military. In close cooperation with NATO, a draft plan for the downsizing of the Armed Forces has been finalized. The new Armed Forces of Croatia should consist of approximately 25,000 personnel by the end of 2005, a reduction of some 17,000 personnel. NATO has decided to support a comprehensive program set up by the Croatian Government to retrain redundant military officers, as part of the defense reforms. The Croatian Separated Personnel Care and Transition Program (SPECTRA) aims to provide support to all groups concerned, whether in developing individual transition plans, training personnel to face the job market or creating pre-identified jobs in the private sector or in other Government agencies.

Mr. Chairman,
With regard to future international treaty negotiations, as stated earlier in this intervention Croatia believes that we should move forward one item at a time, do what is achievable, and then move on to the next item. In this, Croatia shares the opinion of its European partners on the need to convene as soon as possible negotiations on a Fissile Materials Cut-Off Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. In this light, Croatia fully supports the recent initiative of Ambassadors Dembri, Lint, Rayes, Salander and Vega in the CD on a proposal for a Program of Work. We believe that this initiative takes into account the interests of all interested parties, and provides an excellent opportunity to allow us to get on with what we should be doing in the CD.

Still on CD issues, Croatia once again calls on Conference members to look closely at CD expansion. Croatia has been on the waiting list for CD membership for 10 years, and it seems that we are no closer to entering this body than we were when we first applied. We appeal to Conference members not to hold hostage the expansion issue to other as yet unresolved problems faced in the CD.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, as part of its National Security Strategy, adopted in March 2002, Croatia has expressed its readiness and interest in further modernizing its national legislation in terms of import/export controls through acceding to other international arrangements in the field of arms control. This includes acceding to the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) from 1996 on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, the Australia Group (established in 1985) on limiting the transfer of equipment used in the production of chemical or biological weapons agents, as well as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), formed in 1987 by the G-7 economic partners.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.