

Remarks

**Ambassador John J. Danilovich
Signing Ceremony
Albania Threshold Agreement
April 3, 2006
Tirana, Albania**

**Your Excellency Prime Minister Berisha,
Minister Bode,
Distinguished guests and members of the press,**

It is an honor and a pleasure to be here in Tirana for this momentous occasion. The agreement that we sign today between the United States and the Government of Albania will provide nearly \$14 million in Millennium Challenge Threshold assistance to help Albania initiate a multi-faceted attack on corruption and improve the environment for business.

Corruption threatens democracy, stifles growth, and prevents vital public services from reaching those who need them most. It also weakens foreign and private investment and undercuts the efforts of those laboring to promote a transparent, level playing field for their own development.

So, I congratulate the people and the government of Albania, first for qualifying for the Threshold Program, and also for putting together an integrated and results-oriented plan that addresses the critical and difficult issue of corruption. This plan is a manifestation of Albania's dedication to moving forward and embracing genuine development, growth, and poverty reduction.

By signing this Threshold Agreement today, Albania embarks on a very ambitious journey, aided by MCC. Albania's Program will target corruption on a systemic level, and will include dramatic reforms in the areas of tax administration, public procurement, and business registration.

Making headway against corruption cannot be limited to the efforts of this program alone: it must be coupled with broader and deeper reforms by the Government of Albania, taken on its own, to promote transparency across a range of public and private institutions.

Successful implementation of this program and these broader reforms will bring many benefits for the Albanian people, including:

- A significant reduction in the bribes businesses now pay to win contracts,**
- Substantially reduced bribery in tax collection and business registration, and**
- And simplified and less costly registration for new businesses.**

The Threshold agreement is a two year effort, but the fight must be ongoing. Albania has identified a significant number of interim steps that, if taken, will not only make inroads in addressing corruption, they will institutionalize the fight against it.

I would like to thank those who have been so deeply involved in negotiating this Agreement, including those from both the present and previous government.

- **I offer congratulations to Prime Minister Berisha for bringing all these efforts to fruition.**

I would also like to thank:

- **Ambassador Ries and her staff in Tirana,**
- **USAID Albania Mission Director Harry Birnholz and his staff,**
- **and Rodney Bent and our colleagues at MCC – who have all worked so very hard to bring us to this day.**

Mr. Prime Minister, your leadership has made clear your commitment to moving your great country in a very promising direction. I am very hopeful that, under your stewardship, this Program – combined with the broader efforts of your government -- will bring Albania closer to achieving eligibility for the Millennium Challenge Account, and more important, it will inspire greater confidence of the Albanian people in the institutions that serve them.

Thank you.