



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

**NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR**

**Speech by the President of the Republic of Slovenia  
Nataša Pirc Musar  
at the reception on the 25th anniversary  
of the ITF – Enhancing Human Security**

Presidential Palace, 4 April 2023

Check against delivery.

*Dear newly appointed Chairman of the ITF Board of Advisors, Ambassador Ham,  
Dear outgoing Chairman of the ITF Board of Advisors, Ambassador Aristegui,  
Excellencies, Ambassadors of the Member States of the Board of Advisors,  
Distinguished Chairperson and Members of the ITF Managing Board,  
Distinguished Director of the ITF and colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the 25th anniversary of the ITF today, on the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. Your presence is a confirmation of the high level of consensus among the countries you represent in Slovenia on the importance of humanitarian action as one of the central topics of foreign policy. Welcome once again to the Presidential Palace in Ljubljana!*

*As the first female President of the Republic of Slovenia, I am addressing you at a time of great international crisis. Unimaginable violations of human rights are taking place before our very eyes. Both adults and children, especially in Ukraine, have become victims of attacks with all kinds of weapons. Entire communities and countries are in*

*dire need. The meaning of existence for individuals deprived of their most basic human dignity, especially women, is declining, and we could say that they are steadily losing ground on a slippery slope with no end in sight. In some countries, women are not able to decide for themselves whether or not to pursue an education, they are not able to express their opinions in public or are denied access to basic healthcare. They are also denied the right to make decisions about their own bodies.*

*As victims of the explosive remnants of war, women, children and men cannot live their lives to the full. They are deprived of the ability to carry out the most basic daily tasks, such as moving freely around their homes, schools and towns. They live in uncertainty as to whether they will receive adequate medical care. Huge numbers of people, families like yours or mine, find themselves without basic human security, without the basic hope of living in peace, without the possibility of living with mutual respect, dignity and cooperation.*

*This is why the work you do is so important. It is of the utmost importance that your generous contributions help to clear and destroy the explosive remnants of war, that you help to provide medical care for the victims of conflict and to train them for new professions, that you build the capacities of countries that have virtually collapsed, and that you help all victims to regain the fundamental thing that makes us human: human dignity.*

*Within this context, I am particularly pleased that you are promoting beekeeping as a suitable profession for victims of the explosive remnants of war and that you are also providing training in beekeeping. This is a heritage of which we in Slovenia are justly proud and with which we have made a global mark through the United Nations. The ITF, together with experts from the Slovenian Beekeeping Academy, is successfully continuing this path also in countries where, unfortunately, we are witnessing conflicts of war.*

*In Slovenia, we know what war and the devastation that goes with it mean. Immediately after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we set up the ITF with the mission to help our friends in that country to clear it of landmines and to help all the victims. From its first steps, way back in 1998, to the present day, the ITF has*

*developed into one of the most internationally recognised Slovenian institutions. With humanitarian programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Palestine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Libya, all the countries of the Western Balkans, and, of course, in Ukraine and Moldova, the ITF is the beacon of Slovenian foreign policy with which we seek to bring elements of peace and reconciliation to places where the silence has been drowned out by weapons and explosions, to provide adequate care for people, and with which we seek to restore a modicum of human security and dignity to the victims of conflicts around the world. Some impressions of their work can be gleaned from the photographs on display in the Presidential Palace today – thank you for that too, and I invite you to come and take them in together later.*

*I am proud that the ITF, in partnership with you, the ambassadors of the donor countries, has been able to carry out so many very important humanitarian projects. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the ITF's most important donors in recent years: Slovenia, the United States of America, the European Commission, Germany, Austria, the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Czech Republic, Serbia, the Central European Initiative, and in previous years also Türkiye, Spain, Hungary, OPEC, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Canada, Norway and also others, including a number of private donors.*

*Allow me to express my deepest gratitude for your generosity and long-term financial and political support, without which the ITF would not be the success it is. Thank you for your determination to help even where the situation is often very dangerous, sometimes even hopeless. I hope that the donor community of countries will continue to grow in the future and that new countries will join it.*

*I would therefore like to use today, the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, and also the ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the ITF, as an opportunity to reiterate my call to continue and step up humanitarian action. I urge you, as an international community founded on the principle of the universality of human rights, to continue your noble work to help the victims of conflicts, especially children and women; to help consolidate the universal framework of the values of human rights and human dignity, which is at the heart of our foreign policy and has my*

*active support; to work intensively to put into practice an international system that guarantees fundamental rights for all, without exception and without excuse, such as the right to peace, protection from the horrors of war, protection from the explosive remnants of war, fundamental human dignity and human security.*

*Allow me to conclude with the words of Palestinian teacher Shadia, one of the participants in a recent ITF humanitarian programme, who lives in the West Bank in Palestine. In this particular case, the donors of the humanitarian programme were Slovenia and the Republic of Korea, but it could have been any of you. The aim of the programme was to train Palestinian teachers in the West Bank to provide mental health programmes for child victims of the explosive remnants of war. As part of the workshops, the teachers had to write a letter to Minnie, the doll you see next to me. The letter had to contain an encouraging message to the victims of the conflict. Shadia wrote this on a piece of paper:*

*My dear little girl,*

*Be strong, come out of your bubble of pain, express yourself freely, because life is beautiful.*

*Let our painful memories be part of the past. Let us begin a new life full of hope, love and peace.*

*The future is full of aspirations and goals – let us believe in our ability to achieve them.*

*Let us free ourselves from all limitations, embrace life with love and feel the beauty of what surrounds us, even if it is simple.*

*Let our new motto be "Life is beautiful if we trust in ourselves".*

*With these words from teacher Shadia, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the ITF and all colleagues, past and present, during its first*

*twenty-five years. I wish you continued success in providing safe and effective assistance to the victims of conflict in the future.*

*Thank you.*