

Kosovo (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)
18 January 2001

Mr Neewoor Mauritius

We appreciate the initiative to hold this open meeting to review the implementation of Security Council resolutions concerning the Balkans, and Kosovo in particular. We thank the Secretariat and Under-Secretary-General Guéhenno for the important briefing given to us this morning.

A number of very significant changes have taken place in the region during the past year. We have noted, above all, the successful democratization process in Yugoslavia, starting with the presidential election, which has brought about a change in the political setup in Belgrade. With the election of Mr. Ko.tunica as the new President, Yugoslavia undoubtedly is moving towards stability and normalcy. The recent successful parliamentary election in the country is further evidence that the people of Yugoslavia are determined to close the tragic recent chapter of their history and chart a new and better future for themselves. We are particularly pleased that Yugoslavia has now resumed its membership in the United Nations. These positive developments will undoubtedly have a salutary impact all over the Balkans.

We also welcome the recent successful holding of municipal elections in Kosovo as an important step towards the establishment of a representative authority that should ultimately take charge of the administrative machinery, in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999).

The United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) has done a valiant job in difficult circumstances in carrying out the mandate of resolution 1244 (1999). The out-going head of UNMIK, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, must be commended highly for this. We have no doubt that his successor, Mr. Hans Haekkerup, will do equally well in addressing the enormous challenges Kosovo presents to UNMIK, as he mentioned this morning. We assure him of our full support.

With regard to the people of Kosovo, we note with concern that an ethnic divide still persists and that many citizens of the two major communities are unable to return home and resume normal lives out of fear for their security. We know that wounds take time to heal, whether they be physical or emotional. But these are the same people who have in the past lived as good neighbours in multi-ethnic communities. We believe that is still possible, with a spirit of forgiving and forgetting on the part of all the people of Kosovo. There is hardly any nation today that is not multiethnic and where diverse communities share a common destiny in peace and harmony. There is no reason why Kosovo cannot do the same, provided it guards against falling into the trap of misguided political ventures.

Presently UNMIK and the Kosovo Force are serving as vital lifelines for the people of Kosovo by providing an essential administrative machinery and by promoting peace and reconciliation. We must not be oblivious of the fact that there has to be a lasting and peaceful solution to the present stalemate and that it is in the interest of all the people of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, to create the atmosphere for constructive dialogue to take place among them so as to determine the course they wish to take to ensure a better, peaceful and prosperous future for themselves. The international community must do all it can to encourage this process.

Finally, as members who have spoken before me have done, I wish to express concern about the possible presence of depleted uranium in various areas of Kosovo and the hazard that represents to people there. We encourage UNMIK to continue to address that issue very seriously.