United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 19, 2005

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs
United States Senate
142 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs
United States Senate
123 Hart Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman McConnell and Ranking Member Leahy:

We are writing to ask that you include $10 million for the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) in the Fiscal Year 2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, as requested by the President in his recent budget.

ITF has been a tremendously successful program since its creation in 1998, and its work is strongly supported by the U.S. Department of State. ITF is the principal vehicle for demining and treatment of mine victims in the Balkans and is the sole avenue of U.S. funding for demining activities in the region. ITF operates with great efficiency. Over 97 percent of U.S. contributions are directly used for mine removal programs, victim assistance, and regional cooperation programs. Less than 3 percent of funding is used for administrative costs.

Southeast Europe is an area of strategic importance to the United States and ongoing demining in the region remains a top priority. More than 1,000 demining projects have been undertaken by ITF in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia and Montenegro since 1998, resulting in about 51 million square meters of land returned to safe use. In addition, ITF has treated more than 860 victims of mine-related injuries, including many children, through its rehabilitation institute in Slovenia. Since 1998, ITF has also trained over 300 specialists from the Balkans in rehabilitation, prosthetics, and orthotics, creating indigenous capacity so victims can receive quality treatment nearer their homes.

The United States has provided funding to ITF in the past with the requirement that it be matched by other donors. This arrangement has leveraged nearly $84 million in contributions from twenty-four countries, the European Union, and dozens of corporations and private organizations. We believe that this matching feature should be retained for new funds appropriated for ITF.

Much demining and victim rehabilitation work remains to be done in the Balkans. The $10 million in matching funds for ITF included in the President's budget request is critical as ITF looks to continue and engage in new demining efforts in Southeast Europe. We support this request and urge you to maintain this vital funding in the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill again this year.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our request. We hope that we can count on your support to continue the vitally important activities of the ITF, and are confident that you will find the work of the ITF to be good, efficient, and in the national interest.

Sincerely,

George V. Voinovich

Olympia Snowe

George Allen

Joe Biden

Chuck Grassley

Tom Harkin

Jim Bunning

J. Lieberman

Mike DeWine

Ken Salazar