

**Inauguration ceremony of the Playground for Blind Children, Institute for Blind Children
“Ramazan Kabashi” (Tirana)
18 April 2013
Head of Presence’s Talking Points
(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)**

Mr. Xhaferri,
Teachers, children and parents,

Good morning.

I have been looking forward to this day.

The project we conclude with today’s inauguration ceremony is very close to my heart and to that of my team at the OSCE Presence in Albania.

This project has provided these children with an accessible and safe playground. It is their right to have a place to play, like any other children.

It is therefore very rewarding for all of us to see the final result of our work and think that we have somehow contributed to their well-being and, hopefully, happiness.

But this practical contribution is not an isolated event.

Rather, it takes place in the context of the OSCE Presence’s continuous support, in accordance with our mandate, for the social and political inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as Roma, other minorities, and, of course, people with disabilities.

In this regard, for instance, we supported the drafting of a National Strategy on Persons with Disabilities as well as the establishment and functioning of a National Council of People with Disabilities. I am happy to have here today a representative of the Albanian National Association of Blind.

The setting up of the Youth Disability Forum in Albania is another worthwhile initiative, which we supported, together with our partners from the British Council and the Vodafone Foundation.

Much more can be done, though, to fully include people with disabilities in the public decision-making process as well as to better integrate them into Albanian society.

It is for the good of this country’s future that the human rights of all are fully respected and promoted, without discrimination.

This is a fundamental right and a democratic imperative.

Alas, the truth is that in Albania people with disabilities face far too many challenges in their daily lives, be it access to education, health care or employment, or participation in public and cultural life.

Democratic institutions cannot stay on the side-lines. They must actively engage to remove the barriers that prevent citizens from fully enjoying their human rights and making their contribution to society.

Now, this perhaps small, but nonetheless relevant contribution – a playground for 60 blind children who study and live at the Institute - shows what can be achieved with relatively modest resources.

It also gives an idea of what could be potentially achieved when there is a commitment to people and to solving real social problems.

Dear Mr. Xhaferri,
Friends,

Let me conclude by applauding the work of the Institute for Blind Children “Ramazan Kabashi”, the only public institute that provides such services to blind children in Albania.

Its work is truly commendable. Real, dedicated public service: an example which could and should be followed.

Children, I hope you will all enjoy the playground. And I sincerely hope that, when you grow up, you will have the same opportunities as everyone else in this country.

Thank you very much.