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OPEN LETTER  
BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL  
TO JOURNALISTS ATTENDING  
THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT MEETINGS

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I welcome you as journalists to the 50th Anniversary Summit Meeting of the North Atlantic Council to be held in Washington on 24 April 1999, to the NATO-Ukraine Summit also to be held on that day, and to the Summit Meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council on 25 April 1999.

These are exceptional times for NATO. Late in March, after the failure of intense diplomatic efforts to end the violence in Kosovo, the Alliance took the grave step of launching air operations against the security forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which are being used by the Belgrade leadership to carry out its repressive policies.

This step, like all decisions in NATO, was taken with the support of all 19 member countries of the Alliance, with the ultimate aim of ending the violence in Kosovo which has led to such appalling suffering, created hundreds of thousands of refugees, and plunged the entire region into a crisis of unprecedented proportions. Our ultimate objective is to reach a peaceful and just settlement in that tragic corner of Europe and to establish a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo. In order to come closer to that goal, we have taken the difficult decision to act now, knowing that if we do not, the relentless oppression of the people of Kosovo will continue without restraint. We are united in these aims.

We are not at war with the people of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. We are convinced that when they learn what their leaders have been doing in Kosovo, in the name of the Serbian people, and are able to see the evidence which is at present hidden from them, they will be as horrified as the citizens of the free world. The inflexible position of the Belgrade government, and the increasingly catastrophic consequences of its repression of the people of Kosovo, confronted the international community with an agonising dilemma. The decision taken by the NATO Alliance was the most difficult of all the options available. It was nevertheless the right one.

I am proud that, in addition to taking strong military action to end the crisis in Kosovo, the Alliance has also made significant military forces available to assist the international humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, in alleviating the plight of the thousands of displaced people who are the victims of the crisis. Steps have also been taken to assist the hard-pressed governments of the neighbouring countries in coping with the enormous strains which have been placed on their resources. However, these are temporary measures, and in the longer term it is only the end of the conflict and the acceptance of a political settlement which will relieve the suffering and allow those who have been made homeless to rebuild their lives.

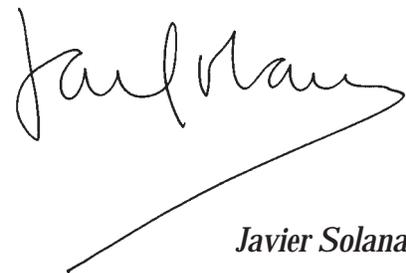
The crisis in Kosovo will, of course, be at the centre of our discussions in Washington, among Allies and in our meetings with our Partners. But this should not eclipse other achievements of which the Alliance is proud.

Our societies have made great progress since the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the artificial division of our continent. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have acted with remarkable and admirable speed to establish democratic standards. A basis now exists for future cooperation to improve stability and strengthen security throughout the Euro-Atlantic area.

Our NATO Summit takes place back to back with the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council - the EAPC. We shall reaffirm in Washington our commitment to continue working for a new, more secure Europe. Our discussions will allow NATO leaders and their counterparts in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to take another stride towards a Europe where military forces exist to help each other solve problems not to confront each other.

In Washington, the city where NATO's founding treaty was signed in April 1949, we will unveil our vision of a new Alliance equipped to handle the complex security challenges that the 21st century is certain to bring. You in the media have the difficult task of informing your publics about these issues. They are often complicated. At first glance, some of them have little immediate relevance to people's everyday lives. I believe that international security, built on trust, cooperation and mutual respect, is nevertheless fundamental for the development of any society's well-being and prosperity.

We therefore count on your professionalism and dedication to inform your publics of events in Washington as they unfold. We, for our part will do all we can to help you fulfil your professional duties. I extend a special welcome to journalists from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, who will be reporting the NATO Summit meeting to viewers and readers at home for the first time as citizens of NATO member countries. And I wish you all every success.



*Javier Solana*