

**Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs William Silkworth
U.S. Embassy, Rome, Italy**

**Remarks (as prepared) for NATO Ventilators Hand-Over Ceremony
NSPA Southern Operational Center
Taranto, Italy
September 18, 2020**

- Good morning. It is an honor to be with all of you here today to mark this important U.S. donation to the NATO stockpile. First, I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals and their staff for their commitment, support and organization for today's ceremony:
 - Brigadier General Renato Lepore, Commander here at the Southern Operational Centre
 - Dr. John Manza, Assistant Secretary General for Operations at NATO Headquarters
 - Mr. Jeremy Gustafson, Senior Development Advisor to the European Command at the U.S. Agency for International Development
 - and Rear Admiral Salvatore Vitiello

- Thank you.

- Today, I want to emphasize the importance of the United States government's shared commitment to peace and security to our NATO allies, but also to Italy, a key partner in the NATO alliance.

- And Italy is not only a key partner in the NATO alliance, but to the United States as the U.S. and Italy share a deep and enduring relationship, enriched by the depth of our people-to-people ties, our long-standing economic and security partnership, and our shared commitment to the same values – democracy, freedom, free and fair trade, and the rule of law.

- The COVID-19 crisis hit Italy early and hard, so I would like to take a moment to offer my sincere condolences to all those families that have lost loved ones this year due to the virus.

- I would also like to congratulate Italy for the effective measures the country adopted to combat the pandemic and especially all the medical and healthcare professionals for their incredible work and enormous sacrifices

they have demonstrated this year. The Italian government has shown resolve, foresight and decisiveness, offering a model for other countries.

- Yet, it is in times of trouble that true friends are needed most, and Americans stand together with Italy, as we have so many times in the past.
- As many of you know, the United States came to Italy's aid in the face of the pandemic, providing significant assistance and the U.S. private sector separately has donated over 50 million euros during the emergency.
- The United States government's assistance to Italy's fight against COVID-19 includes \$50 million from USAID in support of Italian NGOs and faith-based organizations for high-tech durable medical equipment, and in support of Italian industries that are mobilizing to increase the production of pandemic-related necessities.
- Beyond this, our support also includes millions of dollars of supplies provided through the U.S. Office of Defense Cooperation, which has purchased personal protective equipment, funded direct donations to communities where U.S. service members live – including across regions in southern Italy -- and facilitated multiple donations of defense articles and hospital equipment.
- Collaboration on pandemic response and technical research programs between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Italian Ministry of Health represents yet another area of U.S. support.
- It is a great honor to work alongside each of you here today as we continue to strengthen and expand the U.S. – Italy and U.S. -- NATO security partnership.
- This year's global pandemic is not the first crisis that we have faced together, and we will continue to work together on long-term goals of strengthening our alliances and working together towards economic recovery. Together we work to support democracy, freedom and transparency and we will always work for these, side by side.
- Thank you.