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Remarks to the Press by Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General upon his arrival at NATO Headquarters

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In just a few moments I will take up my duties as the tenth Secretary General of NATO. It will be my privilege and my duty to take this great Alliance into the twenty first century and its next fifty years.

I could not be here at a better time. NATO is in excellent shape. It has proved in recent months that it is fully up to even the most demanding security challenges in the Euro-Atlantic region today. For that I must pay tribute to my predecessor, Javier Solana. He steered NATO through some momentous and difficult moments: the first NATO peacekeeping mission beyond its territory in Bosnia; the first enlargement of the Alliance since the end of the Cold War; historic agreements with Russia and Ukraine; the deepening of partnership with 24 Central European and Central Asian countries; internal reform such as the new NATO command structure; and last but, of course, not least the ultimate test of NATO's 78 day air campaign to stop terrible human suffering in Kosovo.

Javier Solana's four years at the helm were full of excitement. But I do not believe that my time here as Secretary General will be any less interesting, nor any less challenging. Success has to be reinforced. My job is to ensure that NATO does not rest on its laurels but continues to move forward to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Indeed the agenda for the first years of the 21st century is already upon us; and it is a daunting one.

NATO will have to play its full role in the stabilisation of the Balkans in the wake of the Kosovo crisis. We will have to ensure that our peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo create as rapidly as possible the conditions for a self-sustaining peace. We will have to contribute actively to the Stability Pact and reinforce our partnerships with the countries of the south-east European region. My goal is a Balkans that is inside the European family of democratic values, not a challenge to it.

Kosovo was a great success for the Alliance. But we must keep our feet on the ground. We have learned many valuable lessons, and I intend to do my best to ensure that those lessons are taken fully into account. For instance, we must work hard to ensure that all the Allies have the technology necessary to operate effectively and to operate effectively together. The Defence Capabilities Initiative is the right way ahead. It will improve our effectiveness, our ability to deploy and sustain forces in the field and the interoperability between Allied forces. This is not just a question of spending more; it is also about spending more wisely. One of my highest priorities is to make sure that the Defence Capabilities Initiative succeeds.

I want also to help reinforce the European role in NATO. The European Security and Defence Identity is not simply an attractive idea; it is also an urgent necessity if NATO

is to be as strong in the future as it is today. I will work to establish practical, effective working links with the European Union as it develops its role in this area. Here I will have the good fortune to have Javier Solana, in his new position, as one of my chief interlocutors. But for me, more Europe in NATO doesn't mean less North America. The transatlantic relationship is still the key to NATO's effectiveness. There can be no stability in Europe, nor protection of our democratic values without a strong transatlantic relationship.

Another of my immediate priorities will be to establish closer relations between NATO and Russia. I welcome the fact that Russia is once again participating in meetings of the Permanent Joint Council, including at the military level. It is good that we are discussing Kosovo and our practical cooperation in KFOR. But for me this is not enough. I want to see Russia and NATO realise all the potential of the NATO Russia Founding Act and cooperate in other areas too - for our mutual benefit.

Finally, I want to strengthen still further the links between NATO and its Partners. The Partnership for Peace and the Euro Atlantic Partnership Council have proven their worth in developing a cooperative approach to security across the Euro atlantic area. I want them to become even more operational and relevant to the security needs of all our Partners. At the same time the recent enlargement of the Alliance will not be the last. One of my key responsibilities will be to prepare NATO for its next enlargement early in the next century. I will be seeing how we can use all of the possibilities of our Membership Action Plan to ensure that the next enlargement goes as smoothly as the last.

So as I greet you this morning, I know only too well that I haven't given up my old job in London for a taste of the quiet life.

What lies ahead of me is a great deal of hard work. But I relish this challenge and I know that, like my predecessor, I will be able to count on the support and advice of the 19 Allied governments. I also intend to fully engage you, the members of the press, on all these important and fascinating subjects as they evolve. You will understand that the time to do this is not today as I arrive here to take up my duties . But I hope to meet you all both collectively and individually in the near future to begin this dialogue.

For the time being thank you very much for coming here this morning and I wish you all the best.