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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEKSANDR OPIMAKH,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT THE 15th MEETING OF THE OSCE
ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

**“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable
development in the OSCE area:
Land degradation, soil contamination and
water management”**

Prague, 22 May 2007

Plenary session: Review of the implementation of OSCE commitments

Mr. Chairman,

Environmental and economic security issues are an integral component of the comprehensive OSCE approach. The observance by all OSCE participating States of the relevant commitments and international conventions may be seen as an important contribution to strengthening stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area.

In this regard, we were interested to read the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Review of the implementation of OSCE commitments in the economic and environmental dimension. We agree with many of the proposals in this document, particularly the project proposals to intensify OSCE/UNECE co-operation in the environmental field.

For our part, we should like to mention the efforts by the Republic of Belarus in the context of international environmental co-operation and the measures taken at the national level including those aimed at increasing public participation in environmental policy-making.

The Republic of Belarus is a party to 20 international environmental protection conventions and protocols. The main focuses of its international co-operation activities are the development of international partnerships, strengthening co-operation with international intergovernmental organizations and financial institutions, accession to and participation in multilateral treaties and also the elaboration of bilateral and multilateral agreements with neighbouring States and various countries in Europe and Asia.

Work is being carried out with environmental protection agencies in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the European Union (EU) and international organizations. Co-operation is also being actively developed within the Union of Russia and Belarus.

The second Environmental Performance Review of Belarus was approved at the meeting of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy in 2005. The Review was generally positive but also contained a whole series of recommendations for improving environmental policy, refining law-enforcement procedures and planning and identifying priorities for financing environmental protection measures.

One important event in the context of international environmental co-operation was the accession by Belarus to the Kyoto Protocol in 2005. Although this comprehensive document contains several proposals for combating climate change, it has a large number of procedural features that still need to be studied before it can effectively produce results.

In this connection, we anticipate positive results from the Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) project "Technical assistance to Belarus and Ukraine with respect to their global climate change commitments". This project provides for a national greenhouse gas inventory system including an organizational structure, a smooth-running collection procedure and the summary and analysis of data for the subsequent implementation of practical measures within the framework of the national climate change strategy.

In February 2006 Belarus became a party to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. Participation in this Convention provides greater possibilities for exerting an influence on decisions by neighbouring countries to build potentially dangerous facilities.

Environmental protection and security as a whole are not possible without the development of an environmental information structure and widespread public participation in the resolution of environmental issues.

In this regard, a considerable amount of work is being carried out in Belarus to implement the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

An Aarhus Centre was established in 2005 as part of a joint project by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and the OSCE Office in Minsk. The Centre provides the public with information about the environment, organizes educational events and training seminars, and offers advice and legal assistance to citizens in environmental matters.

In 2001, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus established the Public Environmental Co-ordination Council, which includes representatives of 17 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Similar councils have been set up in all parts of Belarus, facilitating participation by members of the public in discussion on legislation.

A public complaints office has been in existence at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection for several years now to deal promptly with information about

violations of environmental legislation. Telephone hotlines exist in all regional councils and the Minsk municipal council.

At the same time, it is also important to further refine the legislative framework with regard to the environment and to develop and make more effective use of modern economic mechanisms to regulate the exploitation of natural resources.

An abiding and important aspect of the work is scientific research and the search for new solutions to the problem of waste management, recycling and processing. A certain amount of progress has been made in this regard but much remains to be done. We are interested in an exchange of the latest findings and the introduction of technological innovations. However, all this requires very significant human and material resources.

Efforts should be concentrated on maintaining biological and landscape diversity and the natural heritage, and on public involvement in the resolution of the country's environmental problems and the development of environmental education programmes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.