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**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
CO-OPERATION OF SPAIN AND CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE
OSCE AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE 15th MEETING OF THE
ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

Prague, 21 May 2007

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to welcome you to the second part of the 15th Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. First I wish to thank the Government and people of the Czech Republic, and especially my colleague Karel Schwarzenberg, for their generous hospitality; and I should like also to thank the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, and the Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Bernard Snoy, and all his team for their magnificent work in organizing this Forum.

After the Preparatory Conference in Zaragoza, where we held discussions and were able to witness the preparations for the International Exposition on Water and Sustainable Development, "Zaragoza 2008", it is a pleasure to meet again in Prague.

For the first time in the history of the Organization, a plenary session is being devoted to the discussion of the environmental challenges in the Mediterranean region, a question which is attracting the attention of the political leaders of the OSCE participating States as well as of the Partners for Co-operation, international organizations, the business sector and non-governmental organizations. I wish to take this opportunity to pay my compliments to the heads of OSCE field missions and the officials responsible for economic and environmental questions and congratulate them on their valuable and fruitful work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globalization, interdependence and the emergence of new threats to security in the OSCE area are blurring the lines separating our Organization's three dimensions. Today we regard them not as independent but as interrelated fields.

One of the key objectives of the Spanish Chairmanship is to achieve an improved balance and co-ordination between these dimensions. That will require of us a comprehensive approach targeting security, sustainable economic development and the promotion of international legality, human rights and democratic values.

We are convinced of the need to promote measures that will ensure peace, stability and co-operation, necessary conditions for maintaining levels of growth and well-being. These efforts must be accompanied by effective measures to protect natural resources and the environment. The results of the United Nations panels of experts and scientists on climate change have sent out disturbing signals, referring us also to the question of human security.

The active defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms helps to guarantee democratic development, stability and security. This is pointed out in the Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century adopted at Maastricht in the year 2003.

The Spanish Chairmanship is placing the emphasis during this Economic and Environmental Forum on environmental protection and sustainable development, because they are closely linked to the quest for stability, security and prosperity. We share the common objectives of achieving sustainable development levels that will raise the quality of life through an efficient use of natural resources and the protection of the environment. In line with this, four main areas have been identified as priorities:

- Environmental security;
- Environmental governance;
- Social effects of environmental problems;
- Sustainable economic and environmental development.

The cause-and-effect relationship between the management of natural resources and possible national and international disputes is a complex reality of our time. The degradation and overexploitation of natural resources, in addition to their control and access to them, are potential factors of destabilization and conflict.

Indeed, demographic pressure and the exhaustion or degradation of resources are challenges which we shall have to take up within the next few decades, and this means that our work and co-operation must become more effective and transparent. We can thus remove the uncertainties regarding the future and confront the new realities on which our security and growth depend. Effective co-operation in the area of natural resources is a way of overcoming tensions and creating a climate of confidence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global challenges call for global responses and political will; they will require material resources and legal mechanisms aimed at further strengthening our co-operation. These must increase our efficiency in confronting pressing challenges, in which global civil society and the international community are involved.

It will be important to include questions related to environmental security in the political agenda, reinforcing the participation of national and international public and private actors and promoting regional co-operation. We must implement systematic sustainable development and economic policies and adhere to the principles of good governance.

The need to recognize the link between the environment and good governance was one of the themes that emerged during the Bishkek and Zaragoza preparatory conferences. Soil degradation and contamination, effective water management, deforestation, the disappearance of ecosystems and climatic change have direct effects on human development. They require effective co-operation, regulation and transparency, along with political responsibility, in order to organize and predict savings in gas and petroleum while a sustainable global energy model is developed.

Some transnational enterprises and ventures act in a non-transparent and discretionary way in these strategic sectors. They fail to exercise social responsibility in the territories and societies in which they operate. If we add corruption to this, we may find ourselves faced with biased and egoistic decisions on the distribution and location of supply points for resources which, like water, are essential to life and development and involve a universal right. Such conduct often leads to inefficient distribution. The World Bank considers that between 20 and 40 per cent of water supply is wasted as a result of corrupt or dishonest practices.

Good governance is nearly always a prerequisite for the adoption of sound environmental decisions and is one of the most important factors in the promotion of social and economic development. Public and private investors need stability and guarantees of good governance in order not to place future interests at risk. The proactive contribution of the business world to the building of peace means its involving itself in institutional strengthening and promoting transparency and good practices. Its inputs are decisive for maintaining stability and economic growth in the long term.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE, in co-operation with other international organizations, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe or the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, plays a major role in strengthening the application of the Aarhus Convention and its principles. The OSCE area has adopted these principles and the Organization promotes them among its participating States. In this spirit, the Spanish Chairmanship supports the development of Aarhus Centres in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Climate change is leading to disturbances in ecosystems, requiring us to display flexibility and to adapt. In decision-making and the adoption of measures, the intensity of these changes and the technological capacities of the societies concerned will be taken in to account. As may be seen from the document prepared for this meeting outlining possible outcomes, the OSCE could become a valuable instrument for helping the participating States in the development of co-operation with other bodies that promote advanced environmental technologies, as well as models and systems for environmental management.

Our Organization can serve as a platform for the exchange of information, good practices and know-how emanating from the environmental technology sector. For this purpose, the Spanish Chairmanship has proposed the organization of an international event concerned with the transfer of technology in the water sector, to be held in Central Asia after the summer.

Environmental degradation, combined with factors such as population growth and the absence of social and economic prospects, contributes towards migration flows. A comprehensive approach to migration involves countries of origin, transit and destination. Increased co-operation with regard to migration has taken place in various areas relating to human rights, security and social and economic development, and integration and multicultural coexistence have become a challenge for societies in the twenty-first century. Hence the desirability of our strengthening our co-operation and participating in the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative launched by the United Nations.

Migration resulting from environmental factors — whether within a State or between extensive geographical areas — represents an important issue for the future of the OSCE area. Our task should be to consider the role of the Organization in the promotion of good practices and in the co-ordination of research methods in order to increase knowledge regarding migration flows brought about by environmental circumstances, a task that affects the OSCE area and in which the contributions of our Partners for Co-operation will be decisive.

Arid lands and deserts make up 40 per cent of the surface of the Earth. Nearly one-third of Central Asia is affected by desertification. Central and Eastern Europe are threatened by soil degradation as a consequence of inappropriate agricultural activities and deforestation. These effects are sometimes aggravated by the contamination of land.

Some areas of my own country are suffering a serious risk of desertification, and 16 per cent of the area of the European Union is affected by soil degradation. The Spanish Chairmanship and the United Nations Conference to Combat Desertification are considering the establishment of a centre on this phenomenon in Central Asia, to permit the exchange of information and procedures for preventing and mitigating its aggravation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE can implement a mandate to evaluate the potential risks to our security arising from economic, social and environmental factors. It is in a position to catalogue and monitor environmental resources and potential threats to our stability. Spain is advocating within the OSCE the elaboration of an Environmental Security Strategy. This will take as its basis the consensus already established in the Maastricht Strategy and will strengthen the undertakings assumed within the Organization.

The Spanish initiative has its inspiration in the indissoluble links between security, economics and the environment. The initial proposal incorporates certain principles or basic guidelines regarding environmental security which must be geared to the future and result in specific actions agreed upon by consensus.

As you know, the first draft of a proposal for an Environmental Security Strategy has already been circulated. I would encourage you to discuss in depth, in Prague and later in Vienna, the two documents outlining the proposed strategy. The Chairmanship hopes to see a Declaration on Environmental Security adopted in Madrid which will be ambitious and demonstrate the effective commitment of all the participating States to an OSCE involved in the protection of the environment. To complement it, a Plan of Action has been drafted, with far-reaching proposals which can place the OSCE at the forefront of the international organizations with responsibilities in the field of environmental security. In our view, it is

time to reflect on the role that we want our Organization to play in these areas and to give a decisive impetus to its economic and environmental dimension. Our proposal for an Environmental Security Strategy offers this possibility, but now it is for all of you to decide whether we are to take this decisive step forward. It is a historic opportunity which we should not let pass.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that we have all contributed to making this Economic and Environmental Forum a “carbon neutral” event, consistent with the subject under consideration. Thanks to the indispensable support of the Office of the OSCE Co-ordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, the volume of carbon dioxide emissions generated by the meeting will be calculated and countered through the large-scale planting of trees, a practice which meetings of international organizations and institutions are beginning to follow.

I should like to take this opportunity to invite you to two important events being convened in Spain: to the meeting in Valencia of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in November 2007 and, in a very special way, to the “Zaragoza 2008” International Exposition on Water and Sustainable Development.

As OSCE Chairman-in-Office, I think that we should reaffirm our political will to promote a debate on the environment and its implications for security, and to take the lead in that debate; Spain will also take this approach in international forums.

So as not to convert into a reality the assertion of Victor Hugo that “nature speaks and mankind does not listen”, it is my hope and desire that the deliberations of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum should be crowned with success.

Thank you very much.