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**STATEMENT BY  
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FRANCE, AT THE CONCLUDING MEETING OF THE 28th OSCE ECONOMIC  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

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**Promoting security, stability and economic growth in the OSCE area by preventing and combating corruption through innovation, increased transparency and digitalization**

**Session III: Preventing and combating corruption in the field of natural resources and environmental protection**

Environmental crime and corruption

Through its ecosystems, our planet provides sources of livelihood, development and income. The sustainability of the natural resources used in our economies and of our food production depends, though, on preserving the environment and biodiversity. Unfortunately, a number of illegal activities are causing the environment to be directly undermined in the OSCE area, namely illegal logging and deforestation, illegal fishing, illegal mining and trafficking in minerals, the dumping of and trafficking in hazardous and toxic wastes, and poaching and illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. These are the main activities that go under the name of “environmental crime”.

According to a joint report from 2018 by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the United Nations Environment Programme [*recte*: by INTERPOL, RHIPTO – Norwegian Center for Global Analyses, and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime], environmental crime is the third most lucrative criminal activity after drug trafficking and counterfeiting. It generates 110–281 billion US dollars annually in profits for criminal networks, depriving the legal economy – notably in developing countries – of 11–28 billion US dollars annually through lost tax revenue. In addition to being one of the most lucrative forms of crime, environmental crime is also regarded as one of the “least risky”. It is accordingly expanding by 5 to 7 per cent annually, or two to three times the rate of the global economy.

Being transnational by nature, environmental crime can have a negative impact on all countries, whether they are countries of origin, transit or destination for such illicit flows. In addition to the financial consequences for States and the private sector, environmental crime undermines biodiversity and natural environments, deprives populations of important resources and affects public health, thereby threatening international security. It can also help to finance armed groups, even terrorist groups, as was emphasized, for

example, by the United Nations Security Council in connection with the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Somalia. There are close links between environmental crime and other types of crime, such as corruption, money laundering and obstruction of justice.

The current public health situation has of late highlighted the links between illegal wildlife trade, zoonoses and corruption. The three main factors that lie behind emerging infectious diseases are the exploitation of wildlife, the intensification of agriculture and changes in land use, including deforestation. These three factors are aggravated by poor governance and by corruption. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), corruption is the principal factor facilitating the illegal trade in wildlife and timber.

The wildlife trade reflects complex patterns of supply and demand, some of which are local, while others are globalized. Epidemics of zoonotic diseases can arise in legal animal markets and farms. In some cases, however, corruption helps to blur the boundaries between legal and illegal markets and to bypass regulations, which heightens health risks.

### International response measures

The international community has recognized the importance of this matter, and a number of response measures have duly been taken at the international level.

The OSCE was one of the pioneers in that respect given that it developed the concept of multidimensional security, which encompasses three dimensions: the politico–military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension.

Signed by 140 and ratified by 186 States, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (or Merida Convention), which entered into force on 14 December 2005, is the sole legally binding universal anti-corruption instrument. In particular, the Convention provides a general legal framework for combating corruption through preventive, law enforcement and asset recovery measures. During the eighth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, held in December 2019, France and Belgium put forward a draft resolution on preventing and combating corruption that facilitates environmental crime, which was subsequently adopted at the plenary meeting. The States parties thereby recognized that corruption underpins illegal trade in natural resources and represents a growing source of profits for various criminal players, and that it was essential to tackle that link in order to take targeted action aimed at reducing the extent of illegal harvesting and trade and at raising awareness of the harmful effects of corruption.

Under its current Chinese Presidency, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is the global body tasked with the monitoring of money laundering, has recently committed itself to treating wildlife trafficking as a priority issue.

As for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Washington Convention; CITES), the Parties recently adopted for the first time, during the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in October 2016, a resolution dealing with corruption, namely Resolution 17.6 on “Prohibiting, preventing, detecting and countering corruption, which facilitates activities conducted in violation of the Convention”. The resolution urges all the Parties “to adopt measures to [...] counter instances of corruption and ensure that any corrupt practices associated with the administration, regulation, implementation or enforcement of CITES are punishable with appropriate penalties under national legislation”.

It is also worth citing here the decisions adopted under the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; the G20 High Level Principles on Combatting Corruption Related to Illegal Trade in Wildlife and Wildlife Products; and likewise the efforts undertaken by the UNODC, the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the World Customs Organization (WCO) and INTERPOL, particularly through the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime.

#### A priority championed by France

During its Presidency of the Group of Seven (G7) in 2019, France emphasized the importance of combating environmental crime. As a result, the G7 interior ministers made dozens of commitments to that effect.

Following on from the draft resolution on environmental crime put forward during the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in December of last year, France continues to address environmental crime in its entirety, on the basis of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime – particularly in relation to the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which is due to take place in Kyoto in March 2021.

Moreover, France supports the strategic nature of international and regional co-operation based on existing international consortiums such as the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), which is a collaboration between the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the UNODC, the World Bank and the WCO. Corruption is a problem that is specifically mentioned in the Letter of Understanding establishing the Consortium, and it is also addressed in the ICWC Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit.

France insists on the need for a multidisciplinary approach when tackling corruption linked to natural resources and environmental management. Accordingly, it wishes to raise this topic for discussion at venues devoted to health and the environment. France is also responsible for a draft motion on environmental crime and in particular on corruption – entitled “Treating organized crime having an impact on the environment as a serious crime” – for the forthcoming World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is due to be held in Marseille in January 2021.

#### Recommendations for the OSCE

Corruption linked to natural resources and environmental management is all too often covered up or played down. As far as the environment is concerned, it is essential to make greater use of the existing anti-corruption legislation, which has some powerful tools at its disposal, particularly in terms of access to bank accounts and financial records, interception of communications and witness protection. However, enforcement alone will not get the job done. We would appeal to all OSCE members and partners that have not yet ratified the United Nation Convention against Corruption or the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to take steps towards doing so, and we would urge all those that are party to the two Conventions to use the provisions contained in them more effectively in order to strengthen national capacity and co-operation with a view to preventing and combating both environmental crime and associated corruption.

At the same time, integrated, multidisciplinary responses that combine enhancement and increased implementation of the law, environment and health are necessary. These responses should be tailored to specific sectors and countries; they can draw on numerous existing good practices and can in turn support initiatives (for the time being, of a voluntary nature) undertaken by the private sector, particularly in the

transport sector and in e-commerce. With regard more specifically to illegal wildlife trade, which has been in the spotlight during the public health crisis, a mere prohibition of markets selling endangered animal species could well end up giving a boost to illegal markets and strengthening the role of organized crime and corruption. The issues of food supply, poverty and corruption should be tackled together in an interdependent manner, rather than separately. Moreover, taking account explicitly of vulnerabilities to corruption when carrying out risk evaluation and mitigation is an indispensable requirement for regulatory responses to be effective.

In conclusion, I should like to exhort the OSCE participating States to take these issues into account in their future commitments, especially at the forthcoming Ministerial Council meeting in Tirana in December.