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TO:
All Delegations of the OSCE Participating States
All Delegations of Partners for Cooperation

24th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum 1st Preparatory Meeting
“Strengthening Stability and Security through Cooperation and Good Governance”

Keynote Speech

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Ambassador Pohl,
Ambassador Zannier,
Dr. Yiğitgüden,
Prof. Töpfer,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times like these, is there anything we all want more than to live in prosperity and security? People from developing and emerging countries also do not want just adequate food and the satisfaction of their basic material needs. They want the lifestyle that many people in the developed world have long taken for granted.

But what does this lifestyle mean for our earth, for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren?

Only a few decades ago the thoughtless exploitation of natural resources was a matter of course. Prosperity and a high standard of living, which is legitimately pursued by all people around the world, were only possible through the use of natural resources. Meanwhile, however, we also see the flipside of the coin: Our lifestyle puts far too heavy a burden on the great opportunities offered to us by our earth.

Natural resources are not infinite. Fossil and mineral resources do not renew themselves within time periods that are on a human scale.

Our interventions in nature threaten biodiversity and decimate species to an unprecedented extent. Clean water, on which our lives are directly dependent, is becoming ever scarcer around the world. Progressive climate change will exacerbate these trends, leading to food shortages and causing more frequent and intense natural disasters.

And today about 20% of humanity uses around 80% of the raw materials that are extracted. Is that our idea of fairness? The environmental damage on the other hand disproportionately affects that 80% of humanity that is hardly involved in the use of these raw materials and thus the benefits they bring. These developments require us to take countermeasures. That is what Germany's Federal Government is working to bring about, and I am counting on you, the OSCE and its participating countries, too.

In the past year, we have achieved breakthroughs in global sustainability policy that give cause for hope:

In September at the UN summit in New York, the international community adopted the transformation agenda for sustainable development ("Transforming our World"). The Sustainable Development Goals it contains provide us with a strong tailwind for the overdue change of course towards better and fairer living conditions and truly climate-friendly and environmentally sustainable development worldwide.

But this will not happen on its own: We must work together towards an ambitious implementation of these sustainability goals, both in industrialised countries and in developing countries, so that the fundamental shift towards sustainable lifestyles and economic practices is successful, and we do not put an ecological burden on the earth that it cannot bear.

As a global community, we need to have made a big change in direction in key areas by 2030: We have to end extreme poverty; we have to fight inequality and injustice. We must achieve sustainable modes of production and lifestyles and successfully combat climate change. The industrialised countries, and by that I mean Germany as well, cannot continue to just import raw materials, but must take responsibility for the consequences of the consumption of raw materials in the countries of origin. This includes, for example, supporting resource-rich developing countries in establishing and maintaining larger parts of the value chain in their country. This creates local jobs and thus the prospects that people need so urgently for their lives.

It is very important that we act together against corruption wherever we encounter it. Let us stand up for good governance. Only in this way can the population share adequately in the proceeds from the resource wealth of their country and promote sustainable development domestically. Only then is there a chance that environmental legislation and standards will be correctly implemented.

Germany declared its candidacy for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) at end of last year. Some of the countries participating here are already members and are therefore role models. I would like to encourage others to take this path, even if it is not easy. Where transparency is created jointly, trust is formed. This is true for civil society as well for government and the economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Above all, we must ensure that there are enough raw materials and other natural resources in the future for all mankind - and that will be more than 9 billion people by mid-century! - And we must still preserve our environment.

We cannot look on idly while the mistakes we industrialised countries made are repeated elsewhere, mistakes which could be avoided given our present knowledge, discoveries and innovative technologies. What we need now is resource efficiency, doing more with less. For

every step in the use of raw materials - from mining through preparation, processing and consumption to disposal - is linked to specific kinds of environmental pollution: pollutants in soil, water and air, the degradation of ecosystems and the reduction of biodiversity.

But resource efficiency is not just an environmental issue: a key driver of increased resource efficiency is competition. Rising and volatile commodity prices, often exacerbated by speculation on the commodity markets, lead to rising costs for businesses and make planning for the future difficult. Using raw materials more efficiently means saving expensive resources, or in other words costs, and becoming more competitive.

This is why the G7 under the German presidency last year agreed to initiate ambitious resource efficiency measures and founded the G7 Alliance for Resource Efficiency at the summit in June. The G7 Alliance is intended to facilitate an exchange of experience, know-how and best practices in the area of resource efficiency. In the few months that have passed since the summit, several workshops on specific resource efficiency topics have been held, and three more are scheduled for the first half of 2016 alone. The great interest in these workshops is proof of the fact that we are moving in the right direction, not just nationally, but internationally as well.

And there is another reason why we should strive for more resource efficiency: the enormous amount of energy needed for raw material extraction and processing. According to the International Energy Agency, between 7 and 8 percent of global energy consumption is used for metal production and processing. The largest share of this is caused by extraction and refining, processing steps that are expected to gain in importance in future as ores with a lower metal content will have to be increasingly used to meet the high demand. But further processing is extremely energy-intensive as well. Around 50 percent of industrial CO₂ emissions can be attributed to the production and processing of just five basic materials: steel, cement, paper, plastic and aluminium. Two tonnes of CO₂ are emitted into the atmosphere for every tonne of steel produced.

Recycling, on the other hand, requires 55 to 98 percent less energy than production from ores, depending on the metal. So it is very obvious where we need to go. We must use recycled metals wherever possible and further step up recycling rates. Every possible material should be reused or recycled, not just metal. Every gram of primary raw material that we can save through resource efficiency and recycling helps us reduce our CO₂ emissions and protect our climate!

This leads me to what was probably the most important environmental policy event of the past year: The Paris Climate Agreement that we adopted in December is a milestone in international climate policy and a beacon of hope for people around the world.

It charts our course for the future: We must become greenhouse gas-neutral. This is an epochal project. It will require a comprehensive modernisation of our industry and society. To achieve this, we need measures that take effect quickly, but also long-term strategies. The policies we pursue in the next few years will determine our success or failure in the decades to come. Resource efficiency must be a part of the overall effort.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current situation shows us that we cannot just wait and see what happens.

A security organisation like the OSCE should also address the risks of climate change. The many refugees coming to Europe are currently very much on our minds.

These people are desperate. They are leaving their home countries to seek a better life elsewhere. To them, it does not make a difference whether they are fleeing from violent conflicts or from the impacts of climate change and environmental destruction. Their fate is the same. In both cases, they are deprived of any prospect of a decent life in their native countries. If we do not succeed in halting climate change, refugee flows will continue to grow, both internal migration from rural areas to the cities and transboundary migration towards the industrialised countries. Many countries are likely to be overwhelmed and unable to handle these developments.

This is why we need to work harder to improve the living conditions in the countries concerned, also in the context of adaptation to climate change. Measures include ensuring a sustainable water supply and agriculture and stepping up disaster response and coastal protection - this is the only way to tackle the roots of migration. For example, the German government has been supporting transboundary cooperation in the water sector in Asia for many years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must do even more. We need to change our consumption patterns, making them more resource efficient and more sustainable overall. We need to get people on board and convince them, each and every one of them. The keys to this are awareness-raising, information, education and participation.

In Germany, a national resource efficiency programme, ProgRess, has been in place since 2012 and is being updated every four years. We will shortly present ProgRess II. A comprehensive public participation process was organised to draw up ProgRess II, and we were very impressed with people's motivation and the excellent ideas they had.

Public participation processes offer a good opportunity to educate people and get them involved at an early stage. It is important to make it clear where and how people can have a say in the decision. This improves acceptance and helps people identify with the results achieved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is up to us to lay the foundations that will allow all people, both those alive today and also the generations to come, to live the way we ourselves want to live: in peace, prosperity and security. Let's get to work!