

United States Mission to the OSCE



**Opening Statement, Concluding Meeting,
2014 Economic and Environmental Forum**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
Prague, Czech Republic
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests. We would like to thank President Burkharter and the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship, Foreign Minister Zaorálek, Secretary General Zannier, and Dr. Yiğitguden, Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, for hosting this Concluding Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum. A tremendous amount of work has gone into preparing this week's event, and the experts who have been assembled to speak to us represent a high caliber of experience and knowledge on preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters. We look forward to their presentations and the discussions they elicit.

With respect to this Concluding Meeting, and as we begin to turn our attention to the final three months of this year, the United States would like to make the following five points:

First, while we are pleased to see a number of delegations here today, with high-level representation from Vienna delegations and capitals, we would like to see more delegations represented in this manner. Within the OSCE, we hear consistent calls for greater attention to economic and environmental issues, and for the Second Dimension to grow stronger, and to take its rightful place alongside the First and Third Dimensions. Yet we do not always see those calls backed up by strong participation in these sessions. Without committed attendance by participating States, we are missing the link between the expertise of the panelists speaking here and the political dialogue that the OSCE is intended to conduct. The value of the EEF process comes from using these panel discussions to expose delegations and policymakers to the experts on the chosen theme for the year. OSCE delegations and policymakers can then consider the security implications of what has been discussed.

Second, the OSCE is a security organization, not a development agency or humanitarian relief organization. It is not designed to prevent or respond to disasters, but rather to examine ways these disasters affect security, and to discuss how cooperation on disaster-related issues could lead to increased security within the OSCE region. We invite the speakers assembled here this week to think about the security implications of their particular areas of expertise. We call on delegations to reflect on two key questions throughout the next three days, and as we work towards this year's Ministerial Council in December: When do disasters trigger security concerns? And when can cooperation among participating States in responding to or reducing the impact of natural disasters lead to better security cooperation?

Third, we must do more to strengthen the ties between the Second Dimension Coordinator's Office and the OSCE's field operations. We are particularly pleased to see the subject and

speakers in Session I later today, when we will discuss the recent flooding in the Balkans. Here we have a valuable opportunity to learn from recent experiences with a disaster that involved three neighboring countries, all of which have hosted or currently host OSCE field operations. We encourage the speakers in that session to reflect upon the security implications of what they saw as the disaster unfolded, and how the OSCE helped, or could have done more, to mitigate any security concerns that emerged.

Fourth, we continue to reiterate the core principles of good governance and anti-corruption that must underpin all our discussions. This topic is no exception. Discussion of this year's theme will not be complete until we consider the effect of corruption on disaster risk reduction and response.

Fifth, we challenge all delegations and the incoming Serbian Chairmanship to do even better in 2015 – to commit to high-level attendance at all three EEF meetings, and to use these meetings to inform and initiate high-level political dialogue that focuses more clearly on the OSCE's role with respect to the topic under discussion.

Once again we thank the Swiss Chairmanship and the OSCE Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities for their hard work in organizing these sessions, and the Foreign Ministry of the Czech Republic for hosting us all so graciously. We look forward to the next three days and the discussions that will undoubtedly follow.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.