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Remarks by the Delegate of the Republic of Korea

*Plenary Session V: Land degradation and soil contamination*

Thank you, Madam Moderator.

Since this is the first intervention by my delegation, I would first like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Czech Republic and the Spanish Chairmanship as well as the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities for the excellent organization of this culminating annual Forum.

I listened with great interest to the practical presentations by the two guest speakers this morning. For a more focused intervention, I will limit my statement with regard to Mr. Gregoire de Kalbermatten, Deputy Secretary General of the UNCCD. His presentation is full of interesting recommendations. Among them, my delegation fully agrees on his view that the OSCE and the UNCCD can provide impulses for selective and well-targeted support to reduce the impact of natural catastrophes such as droughts, sand storms, forest fires or flash floods.

For your information, I would like to share with you two cases of my government's environmental cross-boundary cooperation to address the problem of sand storms and flash floods in our region, Northeast Asia, which may have some relevant implications to this Forum.

First, for my country, the Republic of Korea, the phenomenon of dust and sand storms known as Asian Dust is one of the most worrisome trans-boundary issues directly related to the desertification process occurring worldwide. Originating from the desert areas of Mongolia and China, immense dust and sand storms are carried by prevailing winds thousands of kilometers to Korea and Japan and beyond, sometimes reaching across the Pacific. As the dust and other pollutants

are widely spread by strong winds, they have had a serious impact on public health, business, vegetation, forestry and the marine environment in affected regions. The already disastrous Asian Dust storms are becoming even more intense due to increasing desertification arising from global warming and decreasing rainfall as well as rapid economic development and deforestation in source areas.

The problem is indeed a transnational environmental issue that requires a joint response from all relevant countries and international organizations. In this context, the three concerned Northeast Asian countries—the Republic of Korea, China and Japan—recently intensified cooperative and confidence-building efforts to assess and find appropriate measures to deal with the problem.

The most recent development is the first Tripartite Director General Meeting on Dust and Sandstorms that was held in Korea in March of this year with the participation of several international organizations including ADB, GEF, UNESCAP and UNEF. At the meeting, the three countries agreed to actively cooperate in addressing the common threat and in particular decided as a first concrete step to establish a Steering Committee and two Working Groups for joint research on dust and sandstorms in Northeast Asia. They also agreed to inviting Mongolia to join the Tripartite Director General Meeting in the future, based on the fact that Mongolia is part of a major dust and sandstorm source area.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to request Mr. de Kalbermatten to briefly explain to us the UNCCD's current efforts to mitigate sand storms, one of the serious side effects of desertification.

Second, another example of our efforts to build environmental confidence in our region is inter-Korean cooperation to prevent heavy monsoon flood damage by the Imjin River which is bordering the two Koreas. As a part of its overall reconciliation policy with North Korea, my government has been actively involved in such cooperative undertakings since February 2001, when the first working-level flood prevention consultations took place in North Korea. During the latest round of the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Promotion Committee held last month, the two Koreas decided to implement the agreement on the prevention of flooding along the Imjin River which foresees the

installation of a flood forecast system, reforestation projects, and joint survey of areas in question.

Even though my country has been at an initial stage of such bilateral and multilateral environmental security building measures, we hope that those initiatives will become exemplary cases in Northeast Asian environmental cooperation and also will be counted among the best practices in international efforts to build confidence among neighboring countries in a positive response to trans-boundary environmental concerns and disasters.

In conclusion, my delegation sincerely hopes that these two and a half days of fruitful and lively discussion will lead to concrete policy recommendations and further elaboration of the draft OSCE Environmental Security Strategy that will also help the OSCE participating States and their partner countries to substantially consolidate cooperative relations in the environmental dimension of security in the OSCE area and beyond.

Thank you for your kind attention.