



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Environmental Issues for Earth Day**

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kyle Scott  
at the Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 27, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last Saturday, April 22, was the thirty- fifth anniversary of Earth Day. Earth Day is a time to celebrate gains we have made and create new visions to accelerate environmental progress. Earth Day is a time to unite around new actions. Earth Day and every day is a time to act to protect our planet. Around the world and across the United States, governments, environmental groups and citizens gathered not only to commemorate Earth Day, but also to participate in clean-ups of beaches, forests and parks.

Yesterday, April 26, was the anniversary of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster. Twenty years later, we still remember the victims of this horrible accident and recognize those who suffer today great hardship in its aftermath.

On these two occasions, my delegation would like to talk about an often-neglected part of the OSCE's work: our environmental activities. The Helsinki Final Act provided for cooperation among participating States in, among other things, control of air and water pollution, land utilization, nature conservation and assessment of environmental change.

Many environmental problems respect no borders and threaten the health, prosperity and security of entire regions. When people around the globe lack access to energy, clean water, food or a livable environment, the economic instability and political unrest that may result can affect us all. Addressing these problems and achieving sustainable management of natural resources worldwide requires the cooperation and commitment of all countries.

Our organization conducts some useful activities in the environmental area --most notably through its partnership with the United Nations Environment Program and the United Nations Development Program on the Environmental Security Initiative. But in the bigger scheme of things, the OSCE's contribution to environmental cooperation is relatively small. This is not because we do not have effective and imaginative environmental officers in the Secretariat and our field presences; it is due more to a lack of attention from the participating States.

It is true that many countries, like my own, have substantial bilateral assistance programs to address environmental issues. For instance, the United States is a supporter of the major international effort to clean up the remnants of the Chornobyl disaster. We have concluded bilateral agreements with three Central Asian states to alleviate detrimental environmental conditions in the Aral Sea region, and supported those efforts with a twenty-two million-dollar assistance program. We helped form the Caspian Sea Environmental Partnership

Initiative. The United States also assists other participating States with dozens of smaller bilateral projects, such as Biodiversity Conservation Projects in Bulgaria and Ukraine. We also support on a very small scale Earth Day commemorative activities through our embassies throughout the OSCE region, including recently in Russia and Turkmenistan, where local school children planted trees and cleaned up community parks. And, of course, there is a large number of international organizations and NGO's engaged in the environmental area. All of this activity, however, does not mean that there is no place for the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, we believe there is a lot more that we could usefully do in the environmental area. We could use our organization to help change policies that distort markets and provide incentives for unsustainable development. We could raise environmental awareness through education programs. We could initiate or expand programs to monitor water quality, clean up abandoned mining sites and assist in reforestation efforts throughout the OSCE area. We could even do something as simple as observing Earth Day -- celebrating our planet here in Vienna or at the OSCE field presences.

It seems that the environmental part of the Economic and Environmental Dimension is mostly an afterthought. Only a small handful of participating States fund the vast majority of the activities in this dimension. It's a strange irony in fact that the lion's share of the funding comes from the two countries on the other side of the Atlantic even though most of the projects are here in Europe. Mr. Chairman, we are giving short shrift to our own Helsinki Final Act commitments.

We would urge the Permanent Council to examine modifying the mandates of some field presences that have no authority to conduct economic and environmental activities. By not including this in the mandates of all field presences, we are short-changing one of the OSCE's three dimensions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.