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**CLOSING STATEMENT BY CRISTINA BARRIOS Y ALMAZOR,  
AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE OF SPAIN, AT  
THE 15th MEETING OF THE OSCE ECONOMIC AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

Prague, 23 May 2007

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should first like to thank the authorities of the Czech Republic for the magnificent hospitality and generosity displayed by them, as always, during this second part of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

I also wish to thank the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and his Office for the close co-operation and systematic and meticulous support offered to the Spanish Chairmanship on economic and environmental matters. I am fully confident that the Co-ordinator and his team will continue to lend all their support to the Spanish Chairmanship during the follow-up activities, as well as to the incoming Finnish Chairmanship.

The Spanish Chairmanship proposed a theme that linked soil degradation and management and water management with security in the OSCE area. Unfortunately, the relevance of the subject chosen by Spain has been confirmed by events during this year. To cite only two significant examples, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has again drawn attention to this phenomenon and the Stern report describes its fearful economic repercussions. Paradoxically, economics is alerting us to the fact that the new “dismal science” is going to be the study of ways to protect the natural environment.

The debate on the environment and its principal issues — the loss of biodiversity, desertification, the change in rain patterns, the study of the behaviour of the oceans and the poles and the study of the atmosphere — are closely interrelated, and it can be affirmed that the scientific community, almost unanimously, is convinced that global warming accentuates the changes in these environmental variables.

Unfortunately, I believe that we are witnessing the end of an idea that dated from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution — the belief in constant economic growth and rises in standards of living and an unshakeable faith in the ability of technology to respond to any challenge posed by nature.

The idea of linear progress in the socio-economic conditions of our societies, with periods of acceleration and contraction but as part of a continual advance, has been abruptly invalidated by the impact of human activities on the environment.

Common sense tells us that recognition of a problem is the first step towards its solution. The next step is to identify the origin of the problem and draw the correct conclusions, and the third, and most obvious, step is to do something about it. I think that in the OSCE we are at some point between the second and third steps.

The question of how to combat climate change is naturally outside the competence of the OSCE. There are other forums of a scientific character where this problem area receives special attention.

The contribution of the OSCE must consist not in attacking the causes of global climatic change but rather in dealing with its consequences, particularly with regard to the implications for security.

During our meetings, distinguished and expert speakers have enlightened us on various subjects: developments with regard to environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area, transboundary co-operation in water matters, good governance in the management of natural resources and action to counter soil degradation and contamination. We have also been sensitized to the impact that all these topics can have in the Mediterranean region.

Not all is lost. The anxieties aroused by the hole in the ozone layer, a source of concern during the 1980s and 1990s, have been dispelled by forceful action on the part of the international community.

I think this is the path that we must follow. Ideas for avoiding environmental disasters that may have implications for security in the OSCE area exist. We all know the remedies, though there may be a need for the additional political will required to apply them.

The OSCE has a limited role in the international community, but within its sphere of influence it can help ensure that tensions of varying origins are not aggravated by climatic factors or the poor management of natural resources, thus directly affecting our security.

The preparatory conferences and this Forum have sought to convince us of the full validity of the link between security and the environment. I am sure that the OSCE and its participating States have heard the message.

Now that the 15th Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum is drawing to a close, I should like to mention that preparatory steps by the incoming Finnish Chairmanship are already well under way. The Spanish Chairmanship has followed closely the consultations conducted by Finland on the theme proposed for the 16th Meeting of the Forum, which will concern regional and subregional river and maritime communications in the OSCE area, security and the protection of the environment.

The proposed theme has obvious links with matters discussed in the two preceding meetings of the Forum under the Belgian Chairmanship and the Spanish Chairmanship. This continuity in the discussions will contribute to focusing the work of the OSCE in the

economic and environmental dimension and increasing its effectiveness. I shall be saying nothing new if I express my conviction that, to judge from the reactions of delegations in Prague and consultations in Vienna, the theme enjoys the widest possible support. We hope for a prompt decision on the theme, dates and organizational modalities for the 16th Meeting of the Forum, which will allow it to be well prepared. I wish our Finnish friends every success in the noble task awaiting them.

Thank you very much.