



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Opening Statement

As prepared for delivery by Political Counselor Christopher Robinson  
to the 1<sup>st</sup> Preparatory Meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> OSCE Economic and  
Environmental Forum  
Vienna, January 27, 2014

Good morning, fellow delegates, representatives, and distinguished guests. I would like to thank Ambassador Greminger of the Swiss Chairmanship, Secretary General Zannier, and the Coordinator for Economic and Environmental Activities, Dr. Yigitguden, for bringing us together to open the 22nd Economic and Environmental Forum. The United States welcomes the opportunity to focus this year's forum on improving preparedness and response to environmental challenges.

#### *Recognize Impact:*

The issue of how we address and prepare for these challenges is a vital component of enhancing security and stability in the OSCE region. The frequency and complexity of natural disasters are increasing. Whether hit by earthquakes, floods, tropical storms, wildfires, or any other of a wide variety of potential disasters, no country is immune from the security challenges that can emerge from these incidents. Natural and man-made disasters have severe consequences for the economic and social development of communities and states, as well as for the environmental resources at their disposal. The damage caused often extends across international boundaries, showing that regional cooperation is essential to the prevention of, response to, and recovery from these events.

#### *Foundation set, commitments made:*

Through the organization's existing commitments, mandates, and field mission activities, the OSCE is uniquely positioned to enhance regional cooperation and collective responses to natural and man-made disasters. In the 2003 Maastricht Strategy Document, participating States recognized the growing impact of environmental factors on the security of our States and health of our populations and committed to strengthen common efforts in identifying and addressing environmental threats and disasters. The 2007 Madrid Declaration reaffirmed these principles and enhanced the organization's mandate to raise awareness of environmental challenges, to facilitate dialogue and exchange of best practices, and to deepen cooperation with international organizations working in the area

of the environment. Therefore, the foundation has been established for the OSCE to work to improve our response to natural disasters, to build capacity at the local, national, and regional level, and to improve cooperation between neighboring countries and throughout the regions of the OSCE area.

*Push for Civil Society:*

This forum brings together the OSCE participating States, international experts, and civil society organizations to take stock of our existing commitments and best practices in disaster prevention and to explore ways to utilize fully the Organization's mandates and field mission activities on this issue. We welcome the participation from academia, the business community, and non-governmental organizations contributing to the discussion.

The OSCE-affiliated Aarhus Centers raise awareness of environmental challenges and serve as facilitators between citizens and their governments. The Aarhus Centers can be further utilized to build capacity, help people and governments prevent environmental challenges, and assess the potential impact of natural and man-made disasters.

The Aarhus Center in Astana, for example, held a forum recently on public participation in water and environmental programs, allowing it to serve as an instrument to help the government and civil society move together toward a greener economy and promote sustainable development and environmental security. Greater public participation in environmental matters and access to information are an essential part of transparent and accountable environmental governance.

*Environmental Good Governance:*

We are pleased to see that this forum incorporates a discussion on environmental good governance and applaud the Chairmanship's efforts to promote good governance while also addressing the issue of disaster risk reduction. Combating corruption and enhancing transparency and accountability are fundamental to improving how we respond and recover from environmental threats. The 2012 Good Governance Declaration, which underscores the importance of transparency, accountability, and inclusion of civil society, lays the groundwork upon which we can build. Such principles will lead to greater openness in government decision-making and awareness to ensure not only the resilience of participating States but the health of our communities.

*Strengthening the mandate of the OSCE executive structures:*

The opportunity remains to strengthen the mandate on disaster risk management. We can do more to fully utilize the field missions and institutions

that have success in facilitating regional forums and training. The Border Management Staff College, for example, serves a platform for building capacity at all levels and further advances regional cooperation and information exchange between neighboring countries. Workshops and discussions here in Vienna could also contribute to this effort in a practical and innovative way.

*Gender and the Environment:*

With 2014 marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Gender Action Plan, now is a perfect time to examine how women can play a unique and valuable role in this discussion. We must work to ensure equitable participation of both men and women in capacity building workshops that promote responsible natural resource management. Participating States should also work to increase equal representation in policy making and instruments aimed at improving resilience and response to environmental challenges. At the level of individual households, women often play decisive roles in managing and preserving biodiversity, water, land and other natural resources on a local scale. In order to improve management at all levels, that role should expand and reach all the way to the highest levels of governance and decision-making.

We again thank the organizers of this preparatory meeting of the Forum, and extend our welcome to all those who are in attendance. We look forward to an engaging discussion with you all over the next two days, and throughout this year. We commit to advancing the OSCE's role in disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and encourage all of you here today to do the same.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.