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TO THE OSCE, AT THE 15th MEETING OF THE OSCE
ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM**

**“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable
development in the OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and
water management”**

Prague, 21 May 2007

Opening Session

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I should like to thank the keynote speakers for their interesting and informative statements.

The problems and challenges of environmental security have been increasingly attracting the attention recently not only of specialists and academics but also of politicians, representatives of the business community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The problem of environmental challenges is something Belarus has experienced at first hand. We still feel the extremely serious consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which brought about radioactive contamination of a vast area of our country. The consequences of economic activities in Belarus itself, in particular the “melioration” (land reclamation) in Polesye and the extraction of potassium salt, continue to have a negative impact today on the soil and water situation in the entire country.

We therefore actively supported the initiative by Spain to select environmental security and sustainable development as the main subject of the 2007 OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

We share the view that environmental security is one of the key factors in securing sustainable economic and social development.

Belarus is pursuing a systematic and structured environmental policy. The main thrusts of its environmental protection activities are set forth in basic strategy documents such as the National Action Plan for the Rational Use of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection for 2006–2010 and the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus until the Year 2020.

Priorities with respect to environmental security in the Republic of Belarus include the elaboration and introduction of environmentally friendly technologies and equipment in industry, the energy sector, agriculture and transport.

Significant results have been achieved in the last few years in Belarus in the field of environmental protection and rational use of natural resources (protection of the atmosphere and water resources, preservation of biological and landscape diversity, etc.).

Environmental certification, local monitoring and environmental production control have become compulsory elements of the industrial and manufacturing culture.

It has also become plainly evident in recent times that the problems of environmental protection and security cannot be solved successfully by government institutions alone. One of the most important prerequisites for the implementation of national policy is the involvement of the general public in the resolution of environmental protection issues and the adoption of environmental decisions. The achievement of this aim is contingent on raising the level of environmental literacy and awareness on the part of the population and systematically structuring environmental education and training.

At the same time, a realistic appraisal of the environmental situation in Belarus must conclude that there are still serious environmental problems in the country whose solution will require a considerable financial, material and intellectual outlay. This is reflected in the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) report, which will be presented today at a special event.

The main problems include the Soligorsk region, the treatment of hazardous waste (obsolete and prohibited pesticides), radioactive contamination following the accident in 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant (Belarus accounted for 34 per cent of the total caesium-137 fallout in Europe), drinking water quality, energy security and the aftermath of the "melioration" in Polesye.

Belarus is also faced by the problem of the location of large environmentally hazardous facilities in neighbouring countries close to the country's borders. These include, above all, the nuclear power plants in Chernobyl and Rovenska in Ukraine, Smolensk in Russia and Ignalina in Lithuania. In this regard, there is an urgent need to develop close transborder co-operation and the exchange of environmental information with neighbouring countries.

We hope that the fruitful discussion in the Forum with representatives of international organizations, the business community and NGOs will permit not only an exchange of experiences but also the elaboration of new methods and forms of co-operation for the effective management of natural resources and sustainable economic development.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the Spanish Chairmanship, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic for the excellent organization of this Forum.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.