



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**The Secretariat**

**Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE  
Economic and Environmental Activities  
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**Vienna, 21 November**

To: All OSCE Delegations  
Partners for Co-operation  
Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation

Subject: **69<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Economic and Environmental  
Sub-Committee of the Permanent Council  
Item 5: Preliminary debriefing on the first Preparatory  
Conference held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 16-17 November  
2006**

Please find attached the Statement of Ambassador Jose Angel Lopez Jorin, Head of the Spanish Task Force for the OSCE 2007 Chairmanship, presented at the first Preparatory Conference for the 15<sup>th</sup> Economic and Environmental Forum "Land Degradation and Soil Contamination", Bishkek, 16 November 2006.

**STATEMENT  
OF AMBASSADOR JOSE ANGEL LOPEZ JORRIN  
HEAD OF THE SPANISH TASK FORCE FOR THE  
OSCE 2007 CHAIRMANSHIP**

**FIRST PREPARATORY CONFERENCE FOR THE  
15<sup>TH</sup> ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM  
“LAND DEGRADATION AND SOIL CONTAMINATION”**

**BISHKEK  
16 NOVEMBER 2006**

Prime Minister,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you to this first preparatory conference to the 15<sup>th</sup> Economic and Environmental Forum on “Land Degradation and Soil Contamination”.

On behalf of the government of Spain and as the incoming Chairmanship of the OSCE, I would like to thank the Government and people of the Kyrgyz Republic, and especially to H.E. Prime Minister **Felix Kulov**, H.E. Mr. **Alikbek Djekshenkulov**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for their hospitality and for hosting this conference in such beautiful country in the heart of Central Asia. Spain particularly wants to praise the efforts made by the government, institutions, and people of Kyrgyzstan to find, through peaceful dialogue, a common ground from which to keep building a democratic society coherent with our OSCE standards and values. Thanks to a responsive government, responsible parliamentarians, and committed civil society working together, we, as the Spanish upcoming Chair, are more than pleased to witness this step forward in Kyrgyz democracy.

I also want to express our gratitude to the Belgian Chairmanship for its leadership of the OSCE this year, a task that Belgium has accomplished with great success and effectiveness.

My most sincere ‘thanks’ also to Mr. Bernard Snoy, Coordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, and his staff in Vienna, and to Ambassador Markus Muller and his team at the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, for organizing and preparing this conference. Although we are only at the beginning, I can say that you have already done a wonderful job.

Last but not least, I would like to thank and welcome all the speakers and panelists for accepting to share their knowledge and experience with us. I am also pleased to welcome the representatives of key international organizations, government’s representatives, civil society, and OSCE Field Presences, all of which are necessarily actors for the successful development of our theme.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Indeed, this conference is the first major event and the first step in preparing the Economic and Environmental Forum of 2007 under the Chair of Spain. Today and tomorrow, here in Bishkek we will discuss and work on ‘land degradation and soil contamination’ in the OSCE area.

Spain considers that the chosen topic is relevant to the OSCE because environment and sustainable development are closely interlinked to our common pursuit of prosperity, stability, and, above all, security in the OSCE area. We all want great prosperity and we can and must have it without damaging our environment, which in the end is the basis on which our

future development has to be sustained. Therefore, since we firmly believe in this, five Spanish experts have come to Bishkek to actively participate in this conference and help put our topic on the right track.

Land degradation, as you know, is caused by several factors among which: deforestation and loss of vegetative cover, erosion, depletion of soil resources, salinization, and soil contamination. It has adverse effects such as desertification, ground water pollution, agricultural productivity loss, landslides, climate change, natural disasters, etc. What all this really means is that when we talk about land degradation, we must always remember that we are talking about people's lives, lives of persons just like you and me.

The environment (whether it is land, soil or water) is the foundation for economic activity and livelihoods. It is not a luxury! It is the basis for all life, and the life support system of many people. It is vital that we look at land degradation as a local issue involving the particular circumstances of local people; but, at the same time, one driven by global markets and global environmental and development interests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Central Asia is one of the most severely damaged ecological zones, not only in the OSCE area, but in the entire world. Many land and soil related problems at the local and national level are common among Central Asian countries. There are transboundary concerns associated with environmentally unsound management of natural resources.

Desertification is a serious problem in Central Asia. Almost one third of the total territory is desert. An estimated 60% of Kyrgyzstan's land is affected by topsoil loss. Areas in the upper Aral Sea watershed have lost nearly 50%

of their original forest cover. In Kazakhstan almost 60% of the territory is at risk of desertification.

However, it is not only Central Asian countries that suffer from these problems. In Central and Eastern Europe more than a third of the land is affected by soil degradation linked to agricultural mismanagement and deforestation, in addition to severe soil contamination in many areas. There are around 3000 former military sites, abandoned industrial facilities and storage sites which are probably still contaminating. But even in the rich and prosperous EU region, 16% of the land is affected by soil degradation.

In Spain, my own country, one third of the land is at risk or high risk of suffering desertification. But there are regions, such as the Canary Islands, Murcia, and Valencia, where the risk grows up to 90%. That is almost all their territory!!! Soil erosion and forest fires have contributed to this situation.

All of this is to say that: many of land and soil related problems are global in nature and to tackle them we need a global response. Life has demonstrated more than once that an environmental problem today can become a catastrophe tomorrow. But to deal with the challenges posed by land degradation and soil contamination we must put into place sound economic and sustainable development policies, and to stick to principles of good governance – whether they be land reform, food security and agriculture, forest management or watershed management.

Land degradation is a growing problem that needs imaginative, collaborative and multi-sectoral action. The environmental problems that we will discuss during the next two days - land degradation and soil contamination - must be the basis on which to build a closer cooperation, both East and West of

Vienna. This is crucial. Not only because many of the countries in the OSCE area share borders, rivers, and lakes, or form part of the same eco-regions; but also, because many current and future environmental problems and dangers have common roots. Strengthening cooperation means sharing and transferring knowledge, building capacity and stimulating investment, “between states” and “within states”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today’s conference is part of a larger process to promote better understanding, raise awareness and recommend actions on the security implications of land degradation and soil contamination in the OSCE area, that the Spanish Chairmanship wants to lead with your help and contribution.

We face a challenging task. We should not move as if we were in different train carriages rolling in different directions waving as we pass by. We need to act together.

I look to you, ladies and gentlemen, to contribute to advancing our common objective of strengthening co-operation, promoting economic development and bringing about security in our common space.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION