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Fact Sheet: Global Environmental Issues

The environmental challenges confronting the world today are greater than at any time in recent history. Threats to the global environment--such as climate change; stratospheric ozone depletion; and the loss of biological diversity, forests, and fish stocks--affect all nations regardless of their level of development. As a result, the environment is an increasingly important part of the foreign policy agenda. The United States accords high priority to addressing global environmental problems and is pursuing a wide-ranging agenda of action to protect the environment and promote the goal of sustainable development.

UN Conference on Environment and Development

The June 1992 UNCED was a landmark event in addressing the global environment. Unlike other environmental conferences, UNCED focused on "sustainable development," i.e. economic growth that takes into account environmental concerns. UNCED resulted in the adoption of three key documents:

- Agenda 21--an action program to guide national and international environmental and development efforts into the 21st century;
- The Rio Declaration--a statement of principles regarding the environment and development; and
- A statement of principles for the conservation and sustainable use of forests worldwide.

Based on UNCED's recommendation, the United Nations has established a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to monitor implementation of Agenda 21 recommendations. The U.S. strongly supports the CSD as a primary international body for promoting sustainable development worldwide. The CSD will next convene in early 1996 to review progress on the ocean environment. It meets annually to pursue follow-up to the Rio Conference; in April 1995, it reviewed forest issues.

The United States works domestically to implement the recommendations made at the Rio Conference. On June 14, 1993, President Clinton announced the formation of the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PSCD), which now is developing policy recommendations for a national strategy for sustainable development that can be implemented by the public and private sectors. The PSCD represents a ground-breaking commitment to explore and develop policies that encourage economic growth, job creation, and effective use of natural resources.

In addition to the treaties on biodiversity and climate change, UNCED also endorsed a convention to combat desertification. In October 1995, the U.S. signed a new UN Convention on Desertification, which promotes

international cooperation on the sustainable use of fragile, dry-land ecosystems, particularly in Africa. It also addresses one of the root causes of African poverty and hunger. The convention is being prepared to be submitted to the Senate for ratification.

Global Climate Change

That human activities may cause climate change is a serious international environmental concern. The United States has led the effort in response to this threat. Negotiations on a Framework Convention on Climate Change--which began near Washington DC, in early 1991--culminated in an agreement that received more than 150 signatures at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992; the convention entered into force March 21, 1994.

The climate change convention establishes a process to deal meaningfully with this issue. Industrialized countries are developing specific action plans to limit emissions of greenhouse gases and enhance forests and other greenhouse gas "sinks." Other countries are to take similar actions in the future. President Clinton announced in April 1993 that the U.S. intends to return its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. In October 1993, the President presented a National Climate Change Action Plan, containing nearly 50 domestic measures designed to meet the U.S. commitment.

In September 1994, the United States made its national submission, the U.S. Climate Change Report, which details U.S. actions to address the threat of global climate change. It includes the U.S. Initiative on Joint Implementation (USIJI) which promotes cooperation between countries on projects that will reduce or sequester greenhouse gas emissions. The first seven projects for inclusion in the initiative were announced in February 1995. Partner countries include Costa Rica, Honduras, Belize, the Czech Republic, and Russia. The United States expects to announce another round of projects in the near future.

In fiscal years 1994 and 1995, the United States offered \$30 million in financial support and technical assistance to assist developing countries and countries in transition to market economies in establishing analytical foundations for addressing the threat of climate change. Eligible efforts included inventories of greenhouse gas emissions, vulnerability studies, and analyses of options to address vulnerabilities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The United States is now working with more than 50 countries on such studies.

The First Conference of the Parties to review the climate change convention was held in Berlin, Germany, March 28-April 7, 1995. The participants secured a mandate to negotiate "next steps" for the post-2000 era by 1997 as well as to begin a pilot phase for "joint implementation" projects. The United States hopes that the USIJI and similar programs will assist in the development of international criteria for the partnership projects needed to reduce worldwide greenhouse gas emissions.

Protection of the Ozone Layer

The depletion of the ozone layer continues to be a serious problem. The United States has led efforts to address this threat, beginning with a

decision in 1978 to ban the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in non-essential aerosols. The U.S. urged the conclusion of an agreement to restrict the use of CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances in all countries.

This effort has led to a succession of landmark international agreements since 1985 designed to protect the ozone layer, including the 1985 Vienna Convention and the 1987 Montreal Protocol. Countries will completely phase out the production of CFCs and most other ozone-depleting substances by the end of 1996. The U.S. has met its commitments to phase out halons by the end of 1994 and continues toward meeting phase-out targets for CFCs and allied substances by January 1, 1996.

Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity

A central objective of U.S. environmental policy is the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources, pursued through a combination of bilateral and multilateral activities.

The United States is party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which enables the 122 CITES signatories to monitor and control international trade in wild species. CITES was crucial in efforts by the U.S. and other countries to protect the African elephant by banning trade in elephant ivory, and it is now involved in efforts to protect the rhino and tiger. The Ninth CITES Conference of Parties was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, November 7-18, 1994.

While CITES has been effective in protecting species that are threatened as a direct result of international trade, the main cause of species loss is habitat destruction. The U.S. seeks to address this issue through a variety of means, such as increased funding for forest conservation programs, the establishment of protected areas under the World Heritage Convention and other agreements, and through the Ramsar Treaty on International Wetlands.

On June 4, 1993, the United States signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which establishes a framework for countries to cooperate on protecting the earth's species. The convention presents a unique opportunity for nations not only to conserve the world's biological diversity, but also to realize economic benefits from the conservation and sustainable use of its genetic resources. The treaty is now before the U.S. Senate for ratification.

The U.S. is promoting sustainable use of the world's forest resources through the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, which, in April 1995, established an intergovernmental panel to explore more efficient, better coordinated international programs. The U.S. Government and non-governmental organizations are cooperating to help preserve threatened biodiversity-rich forests in countries such as Suriname and Papua New Guinea, and on a regional basis in Central Africa and the Amazon.

The U.S. also has launched a new international partnership--the International Coral Reef Initiative--to promote the protection, sustainable management, and monitoring of coral reefs and related ecosystems, such as mangroves and sea grasses. U.S. partners in this new

undertaking include Japan, Australia, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, France, and the Philippines.

Population and Environment

During the 1990s, world population growth will increase between 90 and 100 million people annually. Unaddressed, global population will almost certainly double and could triple before the end of the next century. The implications of such growth for global economic, political, social, and environmental security are profound.

The third UN International Conference on Population and Development convened in Cairo, Egypt, September 5-13, 1994. This conference provided a once-in-a-decade opportunity to marshal resources behind a comprehensive global effort to stem rapid population growth. The U.S. worked with its international partners to develop comprehensive programs, which include addressing the unmet need and demand for family planning and reproductive health services; developing strategies for improving women's health needs and improving child survival; improving the social, economic, and political status of women; and mobilizing institutional and financial resources to meet these goals. All these initiatives influence population growth and are most effective when pursued together; efforts in this regard will continue.

Financing Environmental Protection

The United States supports effective use of resources and institutions to promote the goals of sustainable development and environmental protection. It has long been a leader among bilateral donors in supporting environmental programs abroad and ensuring that environmental considerations are taken into account in assistance programs. The U.S. foreign assistance budget emphasizes sustainable development, including programs for ameliorating natural resource degradation; protecting water, air, and land from pollution; and making progress toward environmental conservation, among others.

Multilateral institutions remain essential to efforts to promote economic reforms and development in a rapidly changing world; they also are important instruments to promote sustainable development and environmental protection. The United States helps ensure that the multilateral development banks take environmental considerations into account in all their lending programs. The U.S. also strongly supported creation of the Global Environmental Facility, which helps fund projects that provide global environmental benefits, such as those related to climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

Marine Conservation and Pollution

The world's oceans are threatened by human activities such as unsustainable resource use and pollution. The United States long has played an active role in ocean conservation program--from its efforts early in the 1980s to protect whales to a UN-sponsored moratorium in 1992 on the destructive practice of driftnet fishing. The collapse of several valuable fisheries, concern about the continued sustainability of fully and over-exploited fisheries, and the development of new fisheries have brought special attention to international fisheries matters and point to the need for new mechanisms of international

cooperation.

Overall, the U.S. leads international efforts to better conserve and manage important living marine resources through global cooperation. It is a leading proponent of two major international agreements to address marine pollution: the Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, which regulates discharges of harmful substances during the normal operation of ships at sea; and the London Convention, which bans the ocean disposal of a number of wastes and lists others that may be disposed of only with special care.

The United States promotes efforts to address pollution from land-based sources--the most serious threat to the marine environment. UNCED delegates adopted a U.S. proposal calling for an intergovernmental conference--which will be hosted by the United States in Washington, DC, in October 1995--to consider effective ways to deal with this threat.

As a result of the 1980s focus on the adverse impacts of large-scale pelagic driftnet fishing, the UN General Assembly, in 1990, adopted a resolution calling for a global moratorium on the use of large-scale driftnets on the high seas. The United States attaches great importance to continued compliance with this resolution and continues to encourage all nations to take measures to prohibit their nationals and vessels from undertaking any activity contrary to the terms of the resolution.

Through U.S. leadership and international cooperation, the incidental take of dolphins in the eastern Pacific Ocean's tuna fishery area has been reduced to its lowest levels. The United States also is participating in multilateral negotiations toward concluding a Western Hemisphere Sea Turtle Protection and Conservation Convention.

Since 1993, the United States has participated in the UN Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks--an outcome of UNCED, which called for a global conference to promote effective implementation of the provisions of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on fish stocks.

To date, the conference has completed four substantive sessions and hopes to complete its work in August 1995. More than 80 nations are participating.

In addition, the United States is engaged in efforts through the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to improve international fishery conservation and management. The U.S., FAO, and other countries are preparing an international code of conduct for responsible fishing, which will provide principles and standards applicable to the conservation, management, and development of all fisheries. The code will address such issues as fishing operations, aquaculture, habitat, fisheries research, and the integration of fisheries into coastal area management plans. (###)

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The Environment and G-7

Environment has been a key issue for the G-7 since the 1989 Paris

Summit. The Halifax Summit should reinforce efforts that have been made over the past few years to implement the Rio Earth Summit's blueprint for sustainable development--as Agenda 21--and will show support for the conventions on climate change, biodiversity, and the CSD process on forests.

Climate Change. The United States will encourage all developed countries to meet their commitments to return greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 levels by the year 2000 and to consider what measures should be taken with regard to greenhouse gas emissions in the post-2000 period.

Biodiversity. The U.S. works through a wide range of multilateral and bilateral mechanisms to address arresting the rapid loss of species worldwide. It is, however, the only G-7 country which has not ratified the biodiversity convention--one of the major outcomes of the 1992 Earth Summit.

Forests. The U.S. strongly supports efforts by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to develop proposals on the sustainable management and conservation of forests through an "open-ended intergovernmental panel on forests." This panel will provide proposals for action on a range of priority areas. It will consider ways to enhance international forest aid coordination and recommend a clearer division of forest-related work among UN agencies. It also will examine factors effecting trade in forest products and assess the need for additional international agreements, possibly establishing a legally binding forest convention.

On April 30 and May 1, 1995, G-7 environment ministers met in Hamilton, Ontario. EPA Administrator Carol Browner and Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Timothy Wirth attended the meeting, together with environment ministers from other G-7 countries. The meeting focused on three themes:

-- International institutional arrangements for sustainable development and environment issues;

-- Environment-economy integration with emphasis on "greening of government operations;" and

-- Progress on major international environmental issues, including those related to the conventions on climate change and biodiversity.

The institutional arrangements theme focused on CSD and UN Environment Program (UNEP) mandates. It was agreed that the CSD should be the high-level global forum at which broad policy directions and strategic goals for sustainable development are set. UNEP was urged to reaffirm its mandate as the environmental voice of the UN system, focusing on science, environmental monitoring and assessment, catalyzing regional responses to common environmental problems, and promoting the development of international environment law.

Discussions also focused on the role of international financial institutions (IFIs)--expressing the view that the G-7 should encourage the World Bank and other IFIs to emphasize the quality, rather than simply the quantity of loans, and to continue to progress toward transparency and openness by making information available early in the

project evaluation process.

Environment-economy integration discussions focused on "greening" government operations. Participants reviewed their domestic policies to find common challenges related to greening government policy; for example, removing unsound subsidies, using environmental assessments, implementing green tax reform, and promoting job creation through environmental technologies. Participants urged G-7 governments to take the lead in making their operations and activities more environmentally sustainable and sound through their procurement practices, energy use, and building maintenance. The U.S. Government already is moving in this direction through President Clinton's various executive orders regarding the use of recycled products, alternative fuel vehicles, energy-efficient and water-saving equipment, "green" computers, and the reinventing government initiative.

Finally, the participants reviewed ongoing international efforts to address issues related to climate change, biodiversity preservation, and trade in wastes and toxic chemicals. All G-7 countries support action to address global environmental concerns, although each country emphasizes different issues.

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