

**STATEMENT BY MONSIGNOR MIROSLAW S. WACHOWSKI,
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AT THE 16TH MEETING OF THE
OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM:
“MARITIME AND INLAND WATERWAYS
CO-OPERATION IN THE OSCE AREA”
PRAGUE, 19 MAY 2008**

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See wishes to join previous speakers in expressing gratitude to the Czech Government for its hospitality during this Meeting, as well as to the Finnish Chairmanship for organizing the 16th Economic and Environmental Forum of the OSCE.

This year's meeting is dedicated to “maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area” and focuses on the need to increase security and protect the environment. It thus reveals how the three dimensions of the OSCE are intrinsically linked and, hence, the will to explore in a serious way all aspects linked to water – indispensable for a fully human existence. The perspective chosen for this meeting invites us, therefore, to a broader reflection on co-operation, security and protection of the environment.

Water is a source of life on earth and an important factor in the promotion of integral human development. Seas, lakes, and, above all, rivers do not know borders. They are a common good given by God to men and women, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to them. This requires a vision that goes beyond the interests of single States and calls for effective and transparent co-operation between persons, social groups, industry sectors, peoples, States and international bodies. Waterways can be an important factor for accelerating economic growth, sustainable development and for uprooting poverty on the condition that all actors are intent on pursuing joint projects for the achievement of these purposes. This is more than a pious recommendation: co-operation is the only possible way forward. Furthermore, waterways open channels of communication for humanity: they can be a source for an exchange of values between different traditions and cultures; they can help overcome conflicts, as well as offer the opportunity to build bridges between civilizations.

Water resources are a gift of God for us and for future generations. Consequently, the protection of these resources is fundamental. This is a responsibility that falls to each and every one of us and requires that economic activity respect the environment, reconciling the needs of economic development

with those of environmental protection. The Catholic Church has always taught that “every economic activity making use of natural resources must also be concerned with safeguarding the environment and should foresee the costs involved, which are “an essential element of the actual cost of economic activity” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, N. 470). In his Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI said: “We need to care for the environment: it has been entrusted to men and women to be protected and cultivated with responsible freedom, with the good of all as a constant guiding criterion. The human person, obviously, is of supreme worth vis-à-vis creation as a whole. Respecting the environment does not mean considering material or animal nature more important than man. Rather, it means not selfishly considering nature to be at the complete disposal of our own interests, for future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves” (N. 7).

Past natural cataclysms as well as disasters caused by human activities reveal the fragility of the maritime and inland waterways environment. These should spur us to seek ways of avoiding similar incidents in the future. Responsibility for the environment falls to each and every one of us. Consequences of disasters go well beyond national borders and could cause damage to the neighboring countries. With the help of modern technology, today we can avoid, or at least significantly reduce, the number of accidents. This is an opportunity we must not miss. Everyone should be fully engaged in this process. In this regard, however, efficient co-operation and generous solidarity is called for. Highly industrialized countries should share technologies with States that are facing difficult choices between protection of the environment and economic development, thus assisting them in developing systems geared to protecting the environment. The Holy See welcomes and encourages initiatives aimed at enhancing a sharing of best practices, at strengthening co-operation between States, organizations and civil society, and at developing international legal instruments for increasing maritime and inland waterways security.

Mr. Chairman!

The Holy See hopes that this Forum will be able to give a real contribution to the security and protection of the environment on maritime and inland waterways. In itself, this would be an important step in economic and industrial growth, in the development of the human being and in safeguarding the earth, God’s gift to humankind.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.