



**United States Mission to the OSCE**  
**U.S. Statement for the**  
**Forum for Security Cooperation – Permanent Council:**  
**Security and Environment**

As delivered by Deputy Arms Control Delegate Spencer Fields  
February 21, 2024

Thank you, Chairs.

And thank you to our panel of experts for sharing their insights.

Before I continue, I also would like to address the death of Aleksey Navalny. To echo President Biden, like millions of people around the world, I am outraged, if not entirely surprised, by the news. Navalny bravely stood up to the corruption and the violence of today's Russia. He was a powerful voice of truth, even in prison, and he believed deeply in his country. He was brave. He was principled. He was dedicated to building a Russia where the rule of law existed and where it applied to everybody. Navalny believed in that Russia. He knew it was a cause worth fighting for and even dying for. The Kremlin bears full responsibility for Navalny's tragic death, which lays bare Russian authorities' contempt for democratic principles and human rights.

The United States sends its deepest condolences to Aleksey Navalny's family – especially his wife, his daughter, and his son - who have already sacrificed so much for their shared dream of a better future for Russia. In that future, a democratic and peaceful Russia will live in peace with its neighbors and contribute to the comprehensive security of this region rather than undermine it.

Now, when it comes to security and the environment, it is clear the objective reality of climate change's impact on security in the OSCE region cannot be wished away. We cannot and must not allow the Kremlin's twisted world view and its selfish interests prevent this Forum from discussing security threats that demand our attention. There is a clear link between environmental issues, in particular climate change, and security. Countries around the world now view climate change as a growing threat to their national security, and especially the younger generation, who will have to cope with its consequences. Insecurity and instability related to climate change already overwhelm the capacity of some

countries to respond, while heightening tensions between communities. These consequences can risk sparking new armed conflicts, increase demand for humanitarian assistance and stabilization activities, and raise the need for further security cooperation.

Moreover, military forces are often the first responder to natural hazards that are becoming more frequent and intense. At the same time, military activities can cause environmental degradation and worsen climate change.

With this clear connection, it is astounding to hear the Russian delegation claim that there is, quote, “[an] absence of a direct link between environmental issues and the mandate of the FSC.”

It is obvious to us that Russia denies this link because it wants to avoid discussing an issue it views as inconvenient. One reason why it is inconvenient for Russia is because wherever Russia’s forces have been stationed in the past, they have left behind a legacy of environmental damage. Even today, the OSCE is working to clean up some of these legacy sites. For example, in the Kyrgyz Republic, the OSCE is finalizing the removal of the toxic Soviet rocket fuel from a suburb of Bishkek. Russia itself has done nothing to help remove this waste. Instead, it was up to the contributions of other participating States, in particular the United States, which contributed approximately \$800,000, to clean up Russia’s environmental mess.

Furthermore, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has led to unnecessary, man-made environmental disasters of epic proportions. Most visibly, the June 6 breach of Ukraine’s Nova Kakhovka Dam triggered massive flooding that forced the evacuation of thousands of Ukrainian civilians, disrupted water supplies to local populations, contaminated sources of freshwater, led to contaminated floodwaters and sediments polluting a wide area, and destroyed local ecosystems.

Russia’s brutal attacks have severely damaged Ukraine’s energy infrastructure, drinking water and wastewater systems, chemical plants, and mining facilities, degrading Ukraine’s environment, contaminating its soil, releasing polluting and hazardous substances, exacerbating climate change, and undermining biodiversity. More detail on these impacts will soon be available in

the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Report entitled, "The Environmental Consequences of the War against Ukraine," once it is published. This is an important extrabudgetary project funded by the United States and other partners.

Chairs,

To deter war and protect our security, we must understand the ways in which climate change affects military missions, plans, and capabilities. For our long-term security, we must also be mindful of how our military activities are affecting our environment. Therefore, the United States is committed to working closely with Allies and partners to both improve the sustainability and efficiency of our operations, and to enhance our collective adaptation and resilience to the challenges posed by climate change.

The United States is building its own capacity to respond to natural disasters, such as hurricanes and typhoons, by conducting joint military-civilian training exercises focused on rescue and relief activities. We are taking steps to improve the energy resilience and reliability of the installations and operational platforms that we, our Allies, and our partners use. The United States also is investing in game-changing technologies that can reduce our operational forces' energy use by up to 30 percent, thus, decreasing our dependence on fuel convoys and increasing our operational capability. We do this not only to maximize our ability to operate in contested logistics environments but to protect those operational environments as well.

Chairs,

The link between the FSC's mandate and environmental issues is undeniable. We must all work together to mitigate and adapt to its effects on our security. Therefore, I commend Cyprus and Malta for standing up for what's right despite Russia's cynicism and holding today's joint FSC-PC dialogue on environment and security.

Thank you, Chairs.