



Commission de coopération environnementale

Comisión para la Cooperación Ambiental

Commission for Environmental Cooperation

# FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

## **Canada, Mexico and the United States join forces to reduce toxic substances, protect birds and save a major river basin as CEC Council meeting concludes in Banff**

**Banff, Alberta, 28 June 1999**—The environment ministers of Canada, Mexico and the United States today directed the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to develop an action plan to reduce the presence in the environment of the highly toxic substances dioxins and furans, and hexachlorobenzene, to further protect human health and the environment in North America. The decision was one of a number of initiatives announced by the Council of the CEC as it wrapped up its Sixth Session in Banff today.

In other decisions, the Council gave the CEC the green light to launch the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) to protect critical bird habitat across the continent, and to develop an implementation strategy to protect the upper San Pedro River, one of North America's most important migratory bird corridors.

The CEC Council members are Canadian Environment Minister Christine S. Stewart, Mexican Secretary for the Environment, Natural Resources, and Fisheries, Julia Carabias Lillo, and US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol M. Browner. The Council meets at least once a year to review and direct the program activities of the Commission and to receive public input and advice from the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) and other stakeholders.

The Council acknowledged and thanked the Joint Public Advisory Committee for the important contribution it has made in engaging the public and a variety of stakeholders in the work of the CEC and bringing their views to the attention of the Council.

The success of this meeting was evidenced by the following agreements and work:

### ***Sound Management of Chemicals***

In announcing the development of a North American Regional Action Plan (NARAP) to reduce releases into the environment of dioxins and furans, and hexachlorobenzene, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to reduce chemical pollutants affecting the health of their citizens, particularly children.

Minimizing exposure to dioxins and furans will reduce the risk of cancer and damage to immune, neural, endocrine and reproductive systems. Similarly, taking action on hexachlorobenzene will reduce the health risks to breast-fed infants in certain populations heavily dependent on fish.

The Council also agreed to develop an environmental monitoring and assessment action plan in support of the sound management of chemicals. The Council emphasized the importance of monitoring to improve the

relevance, reliability and comparability of environmental information as the basis for decision making, and underscored the critical role of building human, technical and institutional capacity at national and community levels to implement NARAPs and improve the management of chemicals in general.

### ***Strengthening Environment and Trade Relationships***

The Council reaffirmed the importance of working together to make trade and environment mutually supportive. It announced the first ever North American Symposium on Understanding the Linkages between Trade and Environment, to be held in October 2000. In preparation for the conference, the Council released a “Final Analytical Framework for Assessing the Environmental Effects of NAFTA” and issued a call for papers encouraging academics, researchers and policy experts to test the NAFTA effects framework for specific situations.

The Council noted that the discussions between trade and environment officials on Article 10(6) of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) have been very useful in elaborating the operational relationship between the CEC and the Free Trade Commission (FTC). Trade and environment officials have also been discussing areas of future joint work with regard to the environment, economy and trade. The Council emphasized the importance of this work and encouraged the ongoing process to move forward.

The Council recognizes the sovereign right of governments to legislate in the area of the environment. The Council fully supports and encourages the FTC to continue discussions on NAFTA Chapter 11 (relating to the investor-state dispute settlement process). The Council offers to provide any assistance required by the FTC.

### ***Promoting Effective Enforcement and Compliance***

The Council agreed on revised guidelines for submissions on enforcement matters under Article 14 of the NAAEC, governing submissions by the public asserting that a Party to the agreement is failing in the effective enforcement of its environmental law.

### ***Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment***

The Council discussed in depth the difficulties facing negotiators in concluding an agreement on transboundary environmental impact assessment because of the differences in the environmental management systems of the three countries. Council members agreed to work with their respective negotiators and individual border states and provinces to build “good neighbor” agreements based on reciprocity. The goal is to ensure transparency and participation in the processes for proposed projects with environmental consequences in border regions. The Council asked the Secretariat to support the effort by collaborating with negotiators to compile as quickly as possible an inventory of the federal, provincial and state processes and terminology involved.

### ***Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR)***

The Council reaffirms its commitment to assure that the peoples of North America have access to accurate information about the release and transfer of toxic chemicals from specific facilities into and through their communities. The Council supports the continued development and improvement of the North American PRTR system, with a goal of mandatory reporting for all nations.

### ***North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI)***

The Council approved an action plan to conserve birds and their vital habitat through a broad range of strategies based on ecosystems across North America. This initiative represents an unprecedented effort by over 200 public and private organizations, agencies and groups to coordinate actions across borders to ensure the long-term survival of more than 1,400 species of birds throughout Canada, Mexico and the United States. This effort is the culmination of work by the CEC in identifying habitat critical to the preservation of bird species.

### ***Upper San Pedro River Initiative***

The San Pedro River originates in Sonora, Mexico, flowing north into Arizona in the United States. The river constitutes one of the most important North American corridors for migratory birds traveling between Canada and Mexico, and was highlighted by the Council in 1996 at its meeting in Toronto.

The Council voted unanimously to release *Ribbon of Life*, the CEC's report on preserving transboundary bird habitat on the upper San Pedro River. The Council commended the expert panel for preparing a science-based report, the advisory panel for formulating pragmatic solutions in the basin, and the CEC for its successful role in catalyzing a discussion among a diversity of stakeholders leading to a growing number of promising state local and federal initiatives on both sides of this transboundary watershed. The Council encouraged the CEC's continuing participation with a view to the emergence of this initiative as a model of cooperation in the management of transboundary resources.

### ***The Silva Reservoir***

In partnership with the CEC, the governments of Mexico and the state of Guanajuato, and local community organizations, with the cooperation of Canada and the United States, worked together to clean and restore the Silva Reservoir. As a result of their actions, the local community was provided with cleaner water and an important habitat for migratory birds was rehabilitated. The reservoir, which had been polluted by industrial discharges, was the site of mass mortality of thousands of waterfowl in 1994.

### ***CEC Budget and Next Meeting of the Council***

The Council agreed to meet in the United States at its next regular session in June 2000 and to fund the CEC at the level of US \$9 million for the year 2000.

*The Commission for Environmental Cooperation is an international organization created under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation to address regional environmental concerns, help prevent potential trade and environmental conflicts, and promote effective enforcement of environmental law. The CEC mission underscores the importance of public participation to foster conservation of the North American environment.*

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