



## **Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) Ministerial Statement**

*Twenty-first Regular Session of the CEC Council*

**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada, 17 July 2014**—Twenty years ago, North American leaders made a commitment that trade and economic growth would go hand-in-hand with effective trilateral cooperation and protection of the environment across the continent.

Today in Yellowknife, at the first Council Session held in northern Canada, we are honoured to continue this legacy as we celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC).

The NAAEC, as a parallel agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has represented a novel approach for the three countries to support cooperation on shared environmental issues and has been built upon in other free trade and environment agreements over the past two decades.

The CEC, established under the NAAEC, is a unique institution, and its accomplishments are something of which we can all be proud. The CEC has allowed us to leverage our collective knowledge, resources and expertise to enhance collaboration amongst our three governments, engage with the public, and promote partnerships with communities as we join efforts to protect and enhance our shared environment.

### **New Priorities**

This meeting is also a time to look forward. Building on our 20 years of experience and successes, and responding to our regional and global challenges, we will focus on three priority areas for the CEC 2015–2020 Strategic Plan:

1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation;
2. Green Growth; and
3. Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems.

We have agreed on these priorities based on our trilateral engagement, as well as input from the public outreach efforts of our Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC). These priorities address key regional environmental challenges and complement the work each of our governments do domestically and internationally, ensuring the CEC's role as a value-added organization for each of our countries, in line with the commitments made by our leaders at the North American Leaders' Summit meeting in Toluca, Mexico, in February 2014.

Cooperation initiatives, projects and actions under these priorities will be guided by three important cross-cutting themes:

- learning from and assisting vulnerable groups and local and indigenous communities;

- enhancing the alignment of environmental standards and regulations, enforcement, and compliance to promote environmental protection and facilitate trade in North America; and
- enhancing information sharing, transparency, capacity building, and communication.

As we develop a five-year strategic plan for consideration at next year's Council Session, these themes, as outlined in the attached diagram, will continue to guide our efforts.

### **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**

This year also marks the first time that the Council Session has been held in Canada's North. Yellowknife's spectacular natural setting further emphasizes the critical importance of the CEC and the need to protect unique communities and ecosystems across North America.

During today's moderated discussion on traditional ecological knowledge, we highlighted the valuable and integral contribution that local and indigenous communities can provide to our environmental management activities. Within each of our three new priorities, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, Green Growth, and Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems, we intend to work effectively with local and indigenous communities across North America to enhance our understanding of the environment and make effective environmental management decisions.

We also recognize the importance of preserving the traditional knowledge and practices of local and indigenous communities that contribute to addressing the effects of climate change, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and biological diversity.

### **Submission on Enforcement Matters**

This year, we implemented a new reporting approach for submissions on enforcement matters (SEM) as part of our continued commitment to transparency and to the SEM modernization process. Following a proposal by the Joint Public Advisory Committee, each country provided an update on actions taken in connection with submissions concluded in the past year.

The Parties reported on the following submissions: *Quebec Automobiles* and *Protection of Polar Bears* for Canada, *Coal-fired Power Plants* for the United States, and *Lake Chapala II* for Mexico. We look forward to maintaining this reporting approach at next year's CEC Council Session, and beyond.

### **Looking to the Future of Environmental Cooperation**

As we celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CEC and the NAAEC, we continue to collaborate to protect and enhance the North American environment for the well-being of present and future generations.

The work of the CEC remains as important now as it did 20 years ago. As the economic, trade, and social links between our three countries continue to deepen, the NAAEC and the CEC will remain key to our collective success.

We look forward to the 2015 Council Session in the United States.

*The CEC was established by Canada, Mexico and the United States to build cooperation among the NAFTA partners in implementing the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC). The CEC addresses environmental issues of continental concern according to the priorities and objectives set out in the CEC Strategic Plan.*

*The Council, the CEC's governing body, is composed of the federal environment ministers (or equivalent) of the three countries, and meets at least once a year. The Council members are Canadian Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq, Mexican Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources Juan José Guerra, and US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy. The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) is a 15-member, volunteer body that provides independent advice and public input to Council on any matter within the scope of NAAEC.*

For more information on any of the topics reviewed by Council, visit <http://www.cec.org>.

APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL:

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