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**OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – 4th Sub-Regional
Conference**

The High North: Environment, Security and Cooperation

12-13 May 2005

OPENING REMARKS

**Congressman Alcee L. HASTINGS
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr. President,
Mr. Foreign Minister,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by extending the collective gratitude of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to our Norwegian hosts for their hospitality in welcoming all of us in this beautiful city of Tromsø for the Assembly's Fourth Sub-Regional Conference.

Your invitation, Mr. Speaker, reflects once more the traditional commitment of Norway to the CSCE / OSCE process.

The Norwegian Chairmanship of the OSCE in 1999 succeeded in enhancing the OSCE as a unique Organisation in our continent, devoted to preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation.

The Chairman-in-Office at the time, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, was also instrumental in the development of relations between the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Distinguished Members,

This Fourth Sub-Regional Conference reflects the increasing contribution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in environmental and security matters.

The Assembly's Sub-regional conferences, held on a bi-annual basis, have been designed to build and strengthen contacts between sub-regional organisations in order to promote trade expansion and help implement programmes in fields as varied as transportation, energy, environment, culture, and cross-border co-operation.

Dear colleagues,

This Tromso Conference has been designed to cover a wide variety of issues affecting environmental and security concerns in the high north. Altogether about 4 million people live in the Arctic parts of eight OSCE participating States: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.

I am sure the sessions ahead will help us better understand the challenges in this important area of the OSCE.

As stated by Foreign Minister Petersen a few weeks ago in Washington, profound changes have taken place in the High North since the days of the cold war. Mr. Petersen stated that at that time developments were dominated by the huge military presences and hence by military security policy issues.

Today, military policy is not such a dominant consideration. New security challenges – related to climate change, environment and resource management – are now high on the political agenda. Global security is related to how we protect the natural resources on which our lives depend.

I could not agree more with your statement, Mr. Minister, and I hope that in this conference that we inaugurate today we address these important challenges.

When talking about challenges, Petroleum exploitation comes to mind. We will have a full panel of experts addressing this issue in the conference.

The oil and gas resources of our world are clearly limited. We are now facing new situations where countries want to extract them in protected areas, thereby threatening the existence of protected species and indigenous people; this is not a long term solution.

Economic development and environmental protection must be linked.

That's why we welcome initiatives whose goal is to invest in green energies or who try to challenge resource-intensive approaches.

Renewable sources are the energy of the future. We should encourage the development of renewable energies – particularly energy from wind, water, solar power and biomass.

A few days ago – under the auspices of the United Nations - a coalition of institutional investors, recognizing that climate change embodies significant risks and opportunities for investors and our economy, called on other investors, fund managers and financial advisors, companies, and government to respond affirmatively and definitively to climate change, and stated their intention to move forward in the protection of the environment.

I welcome such initiatives that also prove the private sector is ready and willing to commit for a better future.

Norway has always been a leader in developing such policies. *Sustainable development* is a concept of Norwegian origin, and has since become one of the most successful approaches to be introduced in many years. In fact, it has helped to shape the international agenda and the international community's attitude towards economic, social and environmental development.

Let me invite you to keep the concept of sustainable development foremost in our minds during our coming discussions:

"development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". As defined by the Brundtland Commission.

We must support strong economic and social development, in particular for people with a low standard of living. At the same time we must underline the importance of protecting the environment.

Economic and social well-being cannot be improved with measures that destroy the environment. Intergenerational solidarity is also crucial: development has to take into account its impact on opportunities for future generations.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly believes that sustainable development should be implemented in the OSCE area, in order to curb the disintegrating effects of globalisation and to reduce the disparities existing throughout our region.

Therefore, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is working to support market economies in compliance with sustainable development and aims to play an integrating role, by fostering co-operation on economic and environmental matters.

I would also like to welcome the program of the current Russian Federation Chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

The Russian Chairmanship's proposal to celebrate an International Polar Year in 2007-2008 can count on our full support.

Let me conclude on another environmental note by encouraging you in the debates ahead to address ways to better cooperate to conserve, protect and restore the ecosystems of the Arctic.

Let us not forget that a major issue facing us is whether human-induced climate warming can lead to large reductions in the ice cover of the Arctic Ocean. This would have a profound influence on all life in the region, and may also have unforeseen effects on global climate. Judging by the number of participants from non-arctic

States at this Conference, I believe that this point is already accepted by many others around the OSCE.

Again, Mr. Speaker thanks for this opportunity you have given us to discuss these issues in these beautiful surroundings.

Thank you
