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United States Department of State

Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and
International Environmental and Scientific Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20520

November 7, 1996

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MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary
FR: Eileen Claussen *Elee*
SUBJECT: OES: Looking Ahead

Introduction

Through your personal insistence that environmental issues be integrated into core foreign policy, we have made enormous progress over the past year. Within the Department, all the regional bureaus for the first time have begun to incorporate environmental goals systematically into their activities. Still, many of these issues are new to the Department, and if the legacy that you have established is to endure, the continued direct involvement of the Secretary (and the Deputy Secretary) is essential. Within the U.S. Government, OES has become the focal point for setting policy on international environmental issues. We need to consolidate this position in 1997 by overseeing the development of a clear set of government-wide international environmental priorities. Equally important, we must ensure that sufficient resources exist to back them up. This means reassessing the way we fund global environmental initiatives, especially on the development side.

With these broad ideas as the context, let me lay out the four major challenges for OES over the coming year – a critical one for global environmental issues. They are: (1) negotiation, ratification, and implementation of key multilateral environmental treaties; (2) enhancement of bilateral environmental diplomacy, particularly with regard to several priority countries; (3) reform of the United Nations Environment Program – the most important global institution dealing with the environment; and (4) intensification of a focused constituency-building effort with the business and environmental NGO communities.

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Reason: E.O. 12958 1.5 (d)

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Near-term Challenges

None of the challenges I have just outlined take the form of near-term crises that are likely to alter the U.S. policy agenda in the coming three months. Much can be done during this period, however, to continue to lay the groundwork for important progress in the year ahead. Your upcoming trip to China stands as a major opportunity to reinforce the importance of Sino-U.S. cooperation on the environment. Next to us, China is the most significant global environmental player, and as you know, I recently returned from a very positive visit there. Additionally, you may have occasion to announce the last two in the first round of regional environmental hubs, and in so doing lock in place a major component of your environment initiative.

Strategy for the Year Ahead

- A. Multilateral Environmental Treaties: We expect to conclude three key environmental negotiations in 1997, covering climate change, the trade in banned or highly restricted toxic chemicals, and sustainable forest management. Of these, a climate change protocol will be the most difficult and far-reaching, both internationally and within the United States. It will take a massive effort – with other countries, within the Administration, with the Congress, with industry and labor, with the environmental community, and with the public – if we are to be successful. The State Department plays a leadership role in each of these areas, providing us with enormous challenges and responsibilities. In the end, taking meaningful action will require political will at the highest levels, from the Cabinet, Vice President, and President.

In 1997, we must also press for the ratification of several very important treaties, most notably the Law of the Sea and Biodiversity Conventions. As you know, we are at a distinct disadvantage in not being a Party to these agreements, each of which have serious implications not only for the environment but also for U.S. economic and strategic interests. I feel that we must make these issues a higher priority with the Congress when they reconvene in January, even though we recognize that the odds of success are not high.

At the same time as we are working to negotiate additional multilateral agreements, we must ensure that those we have are properly implemented. This will be the primary focus of a major international conference the Department will host in Winter 1998. It will also be an important theme at the UN Special Session next June marking the fifth anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit. This Special Session, designed to be attended by Heads of State, will provide a significant opportunity to boost national and international attention to global environmental issues. We are working to see that the session is focused on treaty implementation, institutional reform, and the climate change issue.

- B. Building Stronger Bilateral Cooperation: None of our efforts to negotiate or implement international agreements can succeed if we do not first do our bilateral homework. Based on my experience, I am convinced that we must do a better job of engaging the countries that have the most influence in global environmental fora – particularly China, Brazil, India, and

the EU. For each, we have, or will soon have, policy dialogues at the highest levels. While these structures can be very helpful in developing a common agenda on key environmental issues, using them alone is not enough. We must make environmental issues a core component of our bilateral relationship with each, raising them consistently and at every level. Even more fundamentally, I believe that as a government, we need to formulate clear and coherent strategies for handling environmental concerns with each of the four. This means making sure that the Department of Energy, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, USAID, and other agencies, are articulating a common approach and that the U.S. Government is concentrating its resources to advance well-defined environmental priorities. As you know, I recently reorganized OES to create a new office with more of a geographic focus, and I think this office would be an excellent place from which to develop and coordinate these individual strategies.

- C. Reforming the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP): Another critical component in our effort to address global issues is a well-organized, well-funded, and forward-looking international institution covering the environment. That should be a description of UNEP, but unfortunately it is not. Over the last four years, UNEP has become largely ineffective as a result of poor leadership, a muddled agenda, and an isolated location. Furthermore, major donors – including the United States – have slashed their contributions by more than fifty percent. As part of our broader United Nations reform effort, we must work to turn UNEP around. With the exception of changing the Nairobi location (something I doubt we can do politically), I believe the other problems can be fixed given a commitment to work with other countries to find acceptable solutions. 1997 presents our best opportunity with the important multilateral negotiations that are underway, the UN Special Session in June, and the beginning of a four-year term for a new executive director (assuming the current director is replaced as we hope will be the case).
- D. Public Outreach: Through your environment breakfast and various other outreach efforts, we have made great strides this year towards improving our working relationships with businesses, environmental NGOs, and others. This is an area, however, where I feel we must do a lot more. As we position ourselves to take a more prominent and forceful role in protecting the global environment, it becomes increasingly important that we develop a solid constituency. Without doing so, we will be unable to either negotiate or implement key agreements and will have increased difficulty securing needed resources. Specifically, I am considering the possibility of establishing a formal Advisory Committee composed of leading representatives of various industry groups and environmental organizations. Additionally, I view the Annual Report on the Environment that we will produce by Earth Day 1997 as a significant outreach opportunity. Rather than simply a report card on the world environment, I view this document as a chance for us to articulate clearly to a domestic audience our global environmental priorities and strategies.