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Working Paper
Summary
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ENVIRONMENTAL COUNTRY REPORTS:

A Proposal for U.S. Global Environmental Monitoring

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Summary

The United States should monitor the environmental records of countries worldwide and produce annual reports on each country. This work would serve multiple purposes:

- Ensure that the U.S. fields an independent capacity to monitor compliance with a new climate change treaty and reports on compliance in ways that are accessible to a wide range of audiences.
- Monitor and report on compliance with a wide range of other multilateral environmental agreements.
- Allow the U.S. to better enforce linkages between environmental protection and preferential access to U.S. markets.
- Facilitate new or stronger linkages between U.S. global policy, including development aid and security assistance, and countries' environmental records.
- Enable policymakers to better identify emerging environmental problems and threats, and work with countries to make measurable progress in addressing such issues.
- Provide corporations, NGOs, and the media, both in the U.S. and abroad, with a new authoritative source of information about countries' environmental records.

This working paper documents the need for global environmental monitoring and reporting, and evaluates the current capacity of the U.S. government to undertake such an effort. It also looks at other monitoring now underway by international organizations, academic institutions, and NGOs. The paper includes a number of findings and recommendations:

- Significant capacity and expertise for global environmental monitoring and reporting already exists within U.S government agencies.
- However, new capacity is critically needed in some areas, such as within the U.S. Foreign Service, which now has limited expertise on environmental issues and should play a frontline role in monitoring efforts.
- The State Department should take the lead role in coordinating and bolstering U.S. capacity for environmental monitoring and producing annual country reports.
- A high level of interagency cooperation will be needed to share information, as well as tackle technical questions related to gathering and evaluating specific kinds of information.

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- Drawing upon existing monitoring by international institutions, global and local NGOs, and academic institutions will be essential to any successful U.S. effort.
- A successful environmental monitoring effort will also require the U.S. to develop a parsimonious set of core environmental standards that can be used to evaluate countries' records.
- Environmental country reports should be written to be accessible and targeted at multiple audiences.
- The United States should also encourage the U.N. Environmental Programme, or other appropriate multilateral body, to undertake new monitoring and reporting efforts worldwide. In collaboration with key allies, the U.S. should help provide the financial and technical resources to support such an effort.

The Need for Global Enviornment Monitoring

Environmental issues are becoming more central to U.S. global policy as awareness grows that the world faces a mounting ecological crisis. In addition, the U.S. public increasingly expects that U.S. trading partners be held to higher environmental standards to ensure a fairer system of trade and globalization. In the private sector, U.S. corporations are under pressure to address environmental problems in their global supply chain and not be complicit in–much less encourage–lax environmental protections in the countries where they operate.

Any new global climate change agreement will heighten scrutiny of countries' environmental records. If the United States takes major steps to cut its greenhouse gas emissions, and also provides financial assistance to help developing countries do the same, the public and lawmakers will rightly want reassurance that other parties to a treaty are living up to their promises and that assistance is being effectively targeted.

Yet despite the growing need for information about the environmental records of nations worldwide, the U.S. government does not engage in any systematic monitoring or reporting. For instance, while the U.S. is party to over 160 multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), it collects little information about compliance with these pacts by other parties and information collected by the secretariats of many of these agreements is often spotty at best.[1] Meanwhile, U.S. monitoring of compliance with environmental provisions in recent free trade agreements–which cover 17 countries–tends to be haphazard.[2] Nor is there effective oversight of compliance with the environmental conditions that often accompany U.S. development aid or taxpayer-backed economic investments.

International organizations and NGOs only partly fill the void in providing data about countries' environmental records. While much excellent research exists about specific countries, only the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) produces anything close to comprehensive and accessible country reports. The OECD reports are useful, but they are not made available to the public without charge, and reporting is limited to member states plus a few high profile developing countries. While some NGOs and university centers undertake country specific assessments, much of this work is quite technical. It is useful to select policymakers with expertise, but hard for other audiences to access.

Even if an international agency like the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) were to undertake country reporting, this information would not be tailored to the specific concerns of U.S. audiences. This situation is reminiscent of the human rights area three decades ago. When human rights first emerged as a major focus of U.S. foreign policy in

the 1970s, the U.S. government collected little information about human rights in different countries and reporting by NGOs and international organizations did not satisfy the needs of U.S. policymakers and advocates. [See breakout box]

The need for the U.S. to compile authoritative information on countries' environmental records will only grow in coming years as the global ecological crisis deepens. Such monitoring would serve at least six distinct goals, as discussed below.

I. Track and Report on Compliance with a New Climate Change Treaty

How to measure, report, and verify (MRV) compliance with any new climate change treaty is a subject of ongoing climate negotiations. The challenge is not just to report on greenhouse gas emission levels, but also the effectiveness of mitigation efforts and the success of financial assistance and technology transfer. It is unclear, as of this writing, what the final MRV components will be of a new climate change treaty. But the Copenhagen Accord of December 2009 stipulated that non-Annex I countries will be allowed to self-report on their progress, with international consultation and analysis, and that this reporting will take place every two years.

Such reliance on self-reporting, even with international oversight, is unlikely to satisfy important U.S. audiences. If the United States signs a new climate change treaty, many in Congress may insist on independent U.S. monitoring and verification efforts–to the extent feasible–as a precondition for ratification. This is understandable given what is at stake both ecologically and economically. To draw an analogy, there is wide recognition of the central importance of the International Atomic Energy Agency in monitoring nuclear arms and non-proliferation, but it would be unthinkable for the United States to rely solely on this agency, and the U.S. has invested heavily in the "national technical means of verification" since the dawn of the arms control era.

Communicating information about compliance with a new climate change treaty to a range of audiences is another important goal. Even if independent measurement and verification by the United States government proves technically daunting or is initially limited in scope, country-by-country summaries of what information does exist will be highly useful. The difference between such reporting by the U.S. government, versus the UNFCCC, is that it can be tailored to the specific needs of U.S. policymakers and presented in a manner that is accessible to the media, advocates, and ordinary citizens.

Regardless of whether the United States signs or ratifies a new climate accord, it will still have strong incentives to independently track GHG emissions by countries worldwide given the threats posed by climate change to both humanity and U.S. interests.

II. Track Compliance with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements

New efforts are also needed to track compliance with a wide range of other multilateral environmental agreements. Currently, there are over 200 MEAs in force in the world and the United States is party to over 160 of these agreements.[3] Some MEAs are relatively well monitored, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Montreal Protocol that governs ozone depleting substances. These MEAs have active secretariats and budgetary resources for tracking compliance.

But many other MEAs are not well monitored and depend upon self-reported assessments by countries that often lack the resources–or the incentive–to fully and accurately report on national performance. Few MEAs beyond CITES authorize their secretariats to independently report on performance by individual countries. And there are no mechanisms under most MEAs to verify the accuracy of national self-reporting. In practice, little systematic and reliable knowledge exists about how well specific countries are complying with their obligations under most MEAs. And information that does exist is often not easily accessible. Bringing together compliance information is challenging when it is scattered between numerous far-flung secretariats, conference of parties, and relevant organizations. Overall, it is very difficult to get any accurate sense of how well the existing global regime of international environmental agreements is working.

A new U.S. monitoring effort would seek to fill this void to whatever extent possible. It could aggregate existing information about country-level compliance with key MEAs and gather, compile, and publicize additional information. The goal would be to present the most in-depth overviews available of how well different countries are complying with key MEAs.

III. Bolster Linkages between Trade and Environmental Protection

Better U.S. environmental monitoring is also needed to strengthen linkages between environmental protection and preferential access to U.S. markets. Since 2000, the United States has ratified new trade agreements that cover 17 countries, and three additional free trade agreements are pending before Congress.[4] These agreements all include environment conditions that both partners must meet, although the stringency of these conditions varies significantly. The Peru FTA, ratified in December of 2007 and implemented in February 2009, includes the strongest standards and enforcement mechanism to date.[5]

Currently, however, the mechanisms for monitoring compliance with environmental standards in FTAs are weak. There is no annual review of whether countries are meeting these standards, but rather potential violations are brought up on a petition system only. In July of 2009 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on the status of four FTAs. While it found that there were distinct commercial benefits to the United States and its partner countries, it also found that enforcement of the environmental (and labor) provisions of these agreements had been very poor. The GAO report attributed much of this enforcement failure to how the environmental provisions were designed and written, as well as a lack of enforcement capacity among the U.S. trading partners. But it also cited an absence of mechanisms for monitoring the environmental provisions within these agreements.[6]

Global environmental monitoring would allow for a more rigorous assessment of whether FTA signatories are meeting their environmental commitments. In contrast to an ad hoc petition system, annual review reports would ensure an ongoing look at compliance and track progress that countries are making year-by-year. Such scrutiny will be useful to multiple U.S. audiences, including executive branch officials charged with managing trade relationships; legislators who play an oversight role on trade; advocates who have pressed for stronger environmental compliance; domestic businesses who want to compete on a more level environmental playing field; the media; and the U.S. public, which has come to expect that more open trade flows be linked to stronger environmental protections. As well, U.S. reviews of the environmental performance of FTA countries would be useful for officials and activists within these countries who see FTA environmental commitments as a point of leverage in policy debates.

Environmental monitoring will also be crucial if new linkages are created between preferential access to U.S. markets and environmental performance. For example, a proposal is now pending before Congress to include environmental eligibility criteria in the General System of Preferences (GSP), the largest trade preference program for developing countries. Over 130 countries receive preferences under the GSP.[7] Currently, eligibility for GSP benefits is enforced via a petition system, which can work in an ad hoc fashion and allow violations to go unreported. Monitoring environmental practices worldwide would make it far easier to identify which countries are complying with any GSP environmental criteria and work with these countries to come into compliance.

IV. Support New Linkages Between U.S. Foreign Assistance and Environmental Performance

As the United States places greater priority on stemming the global ecological crisis, it is likely to insist on more linkages between foreign assistance and environmental protection. In turn, monitoring and enforcing such linkages will require a much larger effort to collect and analyze information about the environmental records of a wide range of countries.

Some linkages already exist between foreign assistance and environmental performance. For instance, aid channeled through the Millennium Challenge Corporation is subject to an environmental review and environmental screening.[8] These requirements are essentially amount to performing environmental impact assessments for any particular project. They do not amount to a holistic or broad based assessment of the environmental policies and practices of the recipient nation. Other organizations, like the World Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, also require environmental impact assessments for projects. By its own estimate the World Bank has failed to implement these standards in many of the projects that it has undertaken in the developing world and has limited capacity for monitoring environmental performance in countries receiving assistance.

V. Anticipate New Security Threats

Environmental problems will exacerbate existing causes of violent conflict and insecurity in coming decades. Climate change is likely to make already arid lands increasingly so, reducing their carrying capacity and contributing to famine, malnutrition, and growing numbers of "climate refugees". River systems dependent on glacially fed fresh water, most prominently in South Asia, will become increasingly stressed, with the potential to heighten tensions between India and Pakistan. In the Middle East, water scarcity will be an additional driver of regional conflict. Increasingly warm environments will also contribute to the spread of infectious disease.

Tracking the emergence of environmentally driven threats, and understanding their likely impact, has become an important task for U.S. policymakers. In the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the Pentagon identified energy and climate change as imperative areas of concern for U.S. strategy. The QDR calls for stepped up international cooperation and a new inter-agency effort aimed at enhancing the U.S. capacity for tracking and understanding environment-related threats.[9] The State Department is addressing climate change in its forthcoming Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. Finally, the CIA has opened the Center on Climate Change and National Security.

These efforts suggest that the national security establishment would be a major consumer of environmental country reports. As well, these national security agencies can be important contributors to such reports as they step up efforts to gather more information about environmental issues worldwide.

VI. Provide Information to Corporations, NGOs, and the Media

Authoritative U.S. reporting on countries' environmental records would become a crucial resource for corporations, NGOs, and the media. As corporations come under growing pressures to reduce their ecological footprint, they are increasingly interested in the environmental practices of countries that are part of their global supply chain. Better information on countries' environmental record would be valuable for executives as they make decisions about overseas investment and production.

A wide range of activists and advocates would also find many uses for environmental country reports. Such reports would help spotlight areas of concern and the often alarming nature of this information would make it invaluable in pushing multiple actors to change behavior–including specific countries, international institutions, corporations, and the U.S. government.

Environmental Monitoring: What Exists, What is Missing?

A range of organizations now engage in some monitoring of global environmental issues. Much of the information from such monitoring is credible and is useful to different audiences. However, there are significant gaps in both gathering and disseminating certain kinds of information and, as well, most monitoring by international institutions, NGOs, and academics is not specifically tailored to U.S. needs.

International Organizations

A number of international organizations are involved in environmental monitoring. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) reviews the implementation of environmental programs with the United Nations and also issues annual reports on the state of the global environment. These reports don't contain specific country analyses. UNEP, in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), operates a web based portal called Ecolex. The purpose of Ecolex is to offer access to a host of environmental legal documents ranging from domestic legislation to international environmental agreements. The UNFCCC, as outlined earlier, is engaged in extensive monitoring of issues related to global climate change and country-by-country emissions. In addition, the secretariats of other MEAs, such as CITES, engage in monitoring of compliance with these agreements. The OECD produces detailed environmental country reports. Reports to date have covered thirty-five countries, only four of which are non-OECD nations.[10] The reports cover a range of environmental practices, offer clear recommendations, and do so in an accessible narrative format. However, these reports are only issued sporadically, focus almost exclusively on developed countries, and do not necessarily focus on issues of direct importance to U.S. audiences.

Think Tanks and Academic Institutions

Yale University produces an Environmental Performance Index (EPI) that analyzes environmental performance of countries worldwide. The Yale EPI, which is currently in its third iteration, has grown increasingly sophisticated and covers numerous issue areas. However, it

is highly technical and does not cover certain issues of particular interest to U.S. policymakers and advocates, like whether countries are enforcing their domestic environmental laws or complying with MEAs they have signed. The World Resources Institute also offers a wide variety of information on environmental practices around the world. The "Earth Trends" reports, which are made available through WRI's website, cover an impressive range of topics. But this data tends to be of little use to the non-expert. This is the main drawback of a data driven evaluation system like WRI's Earth Trends. What they make available is invaluable, and the depth and breadth of the data they disseminate serves a genuine public good, yet it is done with a specific scientific audience in mind. While this information would serve as an excellent supplement to an in depth report, without context, and narrative explanation of the significance of these findings, the database is of little use to non-scientists.

Monitoring Capabilities of the US Government

The U.S. government dedicates significant resources to monitoring international environmental issues, but this activity tends to be scattered across different agencies and not well coordinated.

At the State Department, responsibility for international environmental issues is divided between several different offices. The Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) is tasked with negotiating both bilateral and multilateral environmental agreements, coordinating these agreements with other branches of the U.S. government, and monitoring the enforcement of these agreements. The State Department also describes OES as leading an approach they label Environmental Diplomacy. The State Department's Office of Environmental Policy (ENV) is in charge of crafting a policy response to air pollution, pesticides, hazardous wastes and other pollutants. In this capacity they have served as the principal negotiators on a host of MEAs. ENV is also in charge of managing relations with the environmental offices of international organizations. These includes the UNEP, the OECD's environmental standards organization, and the World Bank. State's Office of Ecology and Natural Resource Conservation (ENRC) is in charge of policy issues related to protecting delicate ecosystems around the world. It works closely with a number of UN-based organizations aimed at preserving biodiversity, preventing land degradation, and stemming the trade in endangered species.

The EPA also works extensively overseas, often in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other U.S. agencies. The EPA's Office of International Affairs (OIA) has a 60 person staff which is divided into three specific work areas: The Office of Regional and Bilateral Affairs manages all of the EPA's regionally and country specific programming; the Office of Global Affairs and Policy works with international organizations and focuses on broad policy issues like trade, the climate, and energy; and the Office of Management and Services provides administrative support and strategic planning for the EPA's international programming.[11]

USAID also engages in environmental work. Among the most high profile of USAID's projects are those in the Amazon River Basin and the Congo River Basin. These projects are aimed at protecting bio-diversity and overall ecological health, as well as promoting sustainable use of forest resources. In addition, USAID undertakes environmental assessments for its development projects that may have an ecological impact. The agency has growing environmental expertise since many of its projects include energy generation, the provision of clean drinking water, and issues of sustainable development. This capacity includes an environmental compliance officer for nearly every country that USAID works in.

The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) also plays a significant role in shaping the international environmental policies of the United States. The USTR has a lead role in enforcing compliance with trade-related environmental provisions. Additionally the USTR issues an annual report on "the trade barriers to greenhouse gas intensity-reduction technologies."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is yet another part of the U.S. government engaged in global environmental issues and monitoring. NOAA and the Department of Commerce have recently developed a climate change information service with the goal of providing an accessible, credible, and comprehensive resource on the issue of climate change. This effort does not create new monitoring capacity, but rather coordinates existing monitoring efforts and compiles and repackages work already being done by scientists within NOAA.

Finally, the Department of Energy works on international environmental issues through its Office of Policy and International Affairs (OI). Within OI is the Office of Climate Change Policy and Technology. Through this office OI consults with other branches of the US government on issues relevant to climate change. The Office of Climate Change Policy and Technology also has a role in evaluating a portfolio of government investments in clean technology valued at over $5 billion.[12]

Human Rights Country Reports: A Model for Action

When human rights first emerged as a major focus of U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s, the U.S. government collected little information about human rights in different countries. This left policymakers and advocates dependent upon reports by NGOs like Amnesty International, as well as media reports. These sources of information were useful but insufficient for U.S. policymakers and advocates. In 1974, Congress mandated that the State Department issue annual human rights reports. This requirement initially met with resistance by the Ford Administration. The State Department, under the leadership of Henry Kissinger, ignored the mandate.

It wasn't until President Jimmy Carter came into office that the first report was issued. The reports had an immediate impact on debates over U.S. foreign policy and quickly became a key source of information for U.S. officials, as well as NGOs and the media. More importantly, they became a diplomatic tool in and of themselves and are used regularly by the U.S. government as a way to criticize and publicize the human rights failings of other countries. While the human rights country reports initially focused on American allies in Latin America and the Middle East, the reporting capacity eventually grew to encompass all UN member states. The breadth of the reporting capacity grew commensurately with the ability of the State Department to handle such a wide ranging and variegated reporting requirement. Greater clarification of core human rights standards in the international community also contributed to the viability of the undertaking.

The human rights country reports are compiled using information from a wide range of sources. Different U.S. agencies contribute to the reports, with the State Department directly collecting testimonials from victims of abuse in some cases. The reports also draw on information from both local and global NGOs, as well as from international organizations. While the reports have frequently been criticized for biased or incomplete reviews, and while rendering judgments on human rights issues can be complex, the State Department's stated intent is to produce objective summaries that are uniform in scope and content. Each country report includes a short overview, as well as sections on different rights.

The Proposal: Environmental Country Reports

Annually reviewing the environmental records of countries worldwide would require the United States to better coordinate reporting activities now under way in different agencies, as well as to create new reporting capacity and expertise in some areas. As well, it would entail drawing on information produced by international organizations, academia, and NGOs. Such an effort would require additional appropriations, but not be unduly expensive. Below, we offer a set of recommendations on what is needed for the U.S. government to compile and disseminate annual environmental country reports.

A Leadership Role for State

The State Department should be given principle responsibility for producing environmental country reports. State currently has the largest amount of capacity in this area and it has institutional experience in compiling assessments of similar complexity and breadth, the annual human rights country reports. The U.S. diplomatic corps, as well as State's network of embassies and consulates worldwide, constitute a major resource for gathering country specific information. Within State, the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs is the logical office to take the lead on environmental country reports.

The State Department will have to develop significant new capacity for environmental monitoring. In many developing countries, there are few sources of information on environmental degradation or regulatory enforcement and the challenges of gathering this kind of information cannot be underestimated. It will require a large front-line presence of knowledgeable U.S. diplomats who interact constantly with local government officials, NGO representatives, and business leaders. Yet currently, the State Department has a core of just 50 Foreign Service Officers dedicated to addressing environmental issues.[13] These officers, known as Environment, Science and Technology, and Health (ESTH) officers operate in embassies around the world. The ESTH officers work both in specific countries and through a system of 12 regional hubs that address regionally pressing environmental issues.[14] Regional ESTH officers are often stretched way too thinly, with one regional hub officer responsible for environmental issues in over a dozen countries.

A key priority should be expanding the number of ESTH officers dedicated to environmental issues. Ideally the State Department would be able to place at least one ESTH officer in every US embassy outside of the OECD countries, as well as staffing key consulates in major countries. Focusing in developing countries is crucial because it is in these countries that the least information is available about environmental conditions.

Staffing these new "green" FSO positions would mean that the State Department would have to actively expand recruiting in the fields of environmental science and ecology, as well as in environmentally oriented public policy programs. Without such an effort, potential environmental diplomats will end up in other fields.

Expanding the Foreign Service's environmental expertise should be a major focus of efforts already underway to expand the Foreign Service overall. Bills currently in the House of Representatives include plans to expand USAID's FSO corps by 700 officers during both 2010 and 2011 and to expand the State Department's FSO corps by 750 in each of those years.[15] The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that this would cost $870 million between 2010 and 2014.[16] Expansion of the FSO corps by 2200 officers should include a dedicated number

of officers being funneled into environmentally specific duties. Allocating 10 percent of this personnel expansion to ESTH or other environmental diplomacy positions would provide for much of the manpower needed to employ a truly global environmental monitoring capacity.

Interagency Cooperation

Beyond bolstering its front-line capacity for monitoring environmental issues worldwide, the State Department should draw from a wide array of information now gathered on these issues by the U.S. government. For example, data captured by U.S. satellite imagery can be invaluable to tracking deforestation, while NOAA has indispensable expertise on climate change. The EPA has scientific specialty on a range of environmental issues. A high level of interagency cooperation will be needed to share information, as well as tackle technical questions related to gathering and evaluating specific kinds of information.

One possibility would be to create an interagency committee, chaired by State, that meets regularly throughout the year to coordinate on producing and vetting different elements of the annual country reports. Such a committee would include representatives from State, EPA, USTR, NOAA, Energy, and the intelligence community.

Interagency cooperation would be particularly important during an initial phase in which State develops and refines environmental country reports. It is important that different elements of the U.S. government agree on which issues are being tracked and the methodologies for assessment. As well, interagency cooperation will be important in ensuring that country reports have maximum reach and are used by all relevant agencies.

Methodology: Crafting Core Standards

A precondition for any successful new U.S. environmental monitoring effort will be deciding on a parsimonious set of core environmental standards that can be used to evaluate countries' records. Without these standards any reporting effort would be bogged down by the size and scope of the undertaking. Not all environmental issues are of equal importance and it is crucial that priorities be established to focus U.S. reporting efforts. For instance, while over 200 MEAs are in effect worldwide, these agreements vary widely in significance and it wouldn't make sense to track compliance with all of them.

One reason for the success of U.S. human rights reporting is there have been extensive efforts to identify core issues and clarify standards in this area. Comparable work remains to be done in the environmental field. The State Department should lead work to craft a core set of environmental standards for use in a new global monitoring effort. This should be done in consultation with other government agencies, congressional committees, international organizations, and leading environmental NGOs. For guidance in this endeavor, U.S. officials should look at how the global labor rights community developed core labor standards during the 1990s. That work culminated in 1998, when the International Labor Organization adopted the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work,* which articulated four core rights that all workers should have. The core standards boiled down some of the most important elements found in over 180 conventions adopted by the ILO since 1919. Since then, these core labor standards have become ubiquitous benchmarks that are used by the United States and other countries in a variety of contexts, including in the annual human rights country reports.

Reporting for "Top Down" and "Bottom Up" Change

Considerable attention must be given to how country reports are organized and presented so these reports can serve a number of constituencies. The human rights country reports offer important insights in this regard. Like those reports, environmental country reports should often contain pointed criticism and help the United States to apply "top-down" pressure on other countries in relation to their environmental records. The reports should provide a regular occasion for the United States to publicly pass judgment on all countries of the world on a subject of vital importance and serve as springboard for other diplomatic pronouncements and activities. It should be kept in mind that the simple unearthing and publication of damning facts can prove embarrassing to governments which prefer to keep certain things out of public view. This is yet another reason why front-line investigation will be key to producing high-impact environmental country reports.

Likewise, as with the human rights reports, environmental country reports would contribute to the "bottom-up" influence of grassroots activists as they push governments toward better policies. These reports would provide activists with new and authoritative sources of information from an influential outside actor. As well, in certain instances they would serve to clearly put the United States on the side of improving policies.

To serve these multiple audiences, environmental country reports will have to be written in a clear, accessible, and compelling manner. These reports should not just include facts and figures, but also narrative details that bring alive important incidents and cases that illustrate larger trends. The reports should be promoted widely, both in the United States and around the world.

Supporting International Monitoring Efforts

The publication of environmental country reports by the United States would not reduce the need for other international monitoring efforts. On the contrary, the United States should push for better international monitoring and share information and expertise to facilitate such monitoring. As a member of the OECD, the U.S. should push to regularize that organization's environmental country reporting, expand the scope of such reports, and ensure that they are more accessible.

The United States should also push UNEP to undertake annual reports on countries worldwide and, in collaboration with key allies, help provide the financial and technical resources to undertake this reporting. The United States can play a role as well in bolstering the capacity of the World Bank for environmental monitoring, so that this institution can better track compliance with its environmental standards.

Finally, the U.S. government should generously share information with NGOs and cooperate with civil society efforts to better track environmental issues around the world. In turn, new monitoring efforts in this sector can be drawn on in developing country reports.

Conclusion

With environmental issues moving to the forefront of U.S. global policy, a major new effort is needed to monitor these issues worldwide. Such monitoring would serve multiple purposes, from verifying a new climate change treaty to helping enforce linkages between environmental protection and U.S. trade policy. Authoritative environmental country reports by the U.S. government would quickly become touchstone documents in policy debates at both the national and international level. They would be invaluable to a range of actors, from members of the U.S. Congress to grassroots activists working in developing countries.

While some additional new capacity will be needed to generate such reports, much of this work can be accomplished by effectively utilizing data that is already being gathered by the U.S. government, as well as international institutions, NGOs, and universities. The State Department is the logical agency to spearhead this ambitious effort and move U.S. diplomacy into a 21st century where ecological threats now constitute some of the gravest challenges facing humanity.

Endnotes

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