

June 19, 2002 -- Ottawa

*For immediate release*

## **North American NGOs Demand Action from NAFTA Environment Ministers**

Representatives of environmental groups from Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. today united in a call for concrete action by the Environment Ministers of the three NAFTA countries to protect environment and health. The Ministers and the groups were in Ottawa for the annual Council meeting of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, the environmental secretariat for the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The environment groups were united on three key issues regarding the CEC and its role;

- The role of Chapter 11 in weakening domestic environmental legislation,
- The need for a firm commitment by Ministers to ensure the CEC has an adequate budget and leadership to fulfill its role, and
- A call for a commitment by the respective Ministers to enforce domestic and multilateral environmental law, and for the CEC to serve as a watchdog, with teeth.

Areli Carreon of Red de Comunicacion de Morelos Mexico, said, "The societies of the three countries can't tolerate environmental impunity and the lack of enforcement of environmental laws. If the current situation continues, it will undermine the credibility of authorities and institutions, and may, at worst, lead to an increase in conflict." A case in point is the massacre in Oaxaca, Mexico three weeks ago where 27 peasants were shot dead in disputes over land and forest resources.

"Despite all the nice rhetoric of the past two days, the failure of our governments to ensure adequate budgets and a smooth leadership transition undermines the CEC's ability to protect the North American environment," said Stephen Porter, senior attorney with the Center for International Environmental Law in Washington, D.C. "We don't need nice words, just show us the money." The current executive director, Jeannine Ferretti has been told her position is terminated, though no replacement is yet evident.

Christine Elwell, senior legal analyst for the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy challenged the three environment ministers to support an intervention by the CEC's Joint Public Advisory Committee into the latest NAFTA Chapter 11 investor-state dispute. A U.S. chemical manufacturer, Crompton, Inc., has given notice of its intention

to sue the Canadian government over restrictions it has imposed on the toxic and persistent pesticide, lindane. "The CEC needs to bring environmental issues and expertise into trade disputes so that important public policy is not decided in a vacuum."

"Ultimately, we need these Ministers to commit to ensuring that existing environmental legislation is enforced , that it is not trumped by trade agreements, and that there is an adequate budget for the CEC to ensure these commitments are met," said Angela Rickman, deputy director of the Sierra Club of Canada.

Other issues raised by the NGOs included the Kyoto Protocol, the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the need to address issues around genetic engineering.

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*The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.*