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Green Week: A fulltime commitment at the GS/OAS to protect our environment and contain costs

The Secretariat for Administration and Finance (SAF), jointly with the Department of Sustainable Development, has been undertaking a number of management initiatives over the past year that will help contain operating costs while promoting an environment-friendly work place. This week, as we celebrate “Green Week” at the OAS, we would like to reacquaint our staff members and member state delegations with those initiatives, share some of the results and announce additional measures that, within the constraints of our resources, will further contribute to protect our environment and contain energy consumption.

Actions undertaken by the General Secretariat (GS/OAS) to reduce costs and save energy include:

- Retrofitting our buildings to replace old and inefficient mechanical and electrical equipment;
- Selecting new energy efficient and environmentally friendly mechanical devices and building supplies;
- Reducing heating and air conditioning operating hours during weekdays and weekends, as appropriate;
- Using 100% recycled paper products and supplies in all bathrooms and kitchens;
- Replacing the traditional telephony system with more cost-effective Voice-over IP (VoIP) technology in the National Offices; and
- Installing videoconference systems, both at the Main Building and GSB, to expand communication tools that will reduce the need for costly travel and commercial phone calls.

The application of these actions is already generating positive results. For example:

- As of August 2008, we have reduced electricity consumption by over 361,700 kilowatt-hours (KWh), when

compared to the same 8-month period in 2007. This has saved the GS/OAS almost \$58,000 in electricity costs. If we are able to maintain this trend, by year's end we will have saved an additional \$29,000. Considering, that this year we have more people working in the buildings and that the unit cost per KWh continues to rise, the cost of utilities per staff member has been reduced significantly.

- VoIP technology is saving more than \$35,000 per year in telephony costs, and the increasing use of videoconference is helping to control travel and related expenses, while reducing our carbon footprint.
- We also have been able to reduce our photocopy paper consumption, thanks to a concerted effort by staff and through changes in policies that strongly encourage the use of electronic means of communication and document transmittal. In 2001, we used 25,000 reams of paper. Today we are using 20,000 reams a year – despite it being a larger organization today. This translates into an estimated savings of \$79,000 since 2001.
- In addition, we are operating our photocopier devices with less electricity, toner, and other supplies. Furthermore, from now on, 30% of all paper used by photocopiers, printers, and fax devices will be made of recyclables.

The General Secretariat initiated this year a full-fledged recycling program that separates the collection of all paper products from trash. The program now includes recycling of plastics, glass, and cans. In addition, discarded computer products and toners are also recycled. The former is disposed of at designated locations assigned by local governments, while the latter items are sold to local vendors, generating a modest source of income for the General Secretariat.

The General Secretariat also provides an incentive to staff to use public transportation and subsidizes Metro Check passes from the fees collected from parking, at no cost to the Regular Fund of the Organization. The cost of this program is estimated at \$33,000 per year. More significantly, it further contributes to a cleaner environment as fewer vehicles circulate in our streets.

Finally, to move forward and to provide a systematic approach to energy conservation, the General Secretariat is applying to the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) for Leadership in Energy Efficiency Design for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB) certification. A contractor soon will identify the necessary upgrades and investments required. Once certified as a “green building”, the General Secretariat will be able to improve the performance of the GSB building, as well as save an estimated 20% annually in utilities and be able to recycle 70% of its waste.

The Secretariat for Administration and Finance, in partnership with our colleagues throughout the General Secretariat, and under the

leadership of the Secretary General, will continue to expand these programs and to seek other opportunities to save energy, reduce costs and protect the environment.

We take this opportunity to thank all staff members for their support and request their continuing cooperation.

Issued by/Emitida por:
Ambassador Frank Almaguer
Secretary for Administration and Finance