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» TopicsRegionsResource ToolsProducts

Global Issues

You Are In: [USINFO](#) > [Topics](#) > [Global Issues](#) > [Environment](#) > [Earth Day](#)

Powell Promotes Partnerships to Solve Environmental Challenges

Secretary of State speaks at Earth Day event



Secretary Powell speaks with young participants at the 2004 Earth Day Environmental Technology Business Exhibition. (DoS photo by Michael Gross)

Secretary of State Colin Powell, hosting an Earth Day event at Department of State headquarters in Washington April 22, emphasized the importance of international, multi-sector partnership in addressing global environmental challenges.

Powell cited two such programs during the Bush administration. The White Water to Blue Water Partnership links governments, businesses and civil society organizations together in order to improve coastal ecosystems and ensure better watershed management practices in the wider

Caribbean region, while the Congo Basin Forest Partnership establishes national networks of protected areas across Central Africa.

"Under the auspices of the Forest Partnership, we seek to develop as many as 27 national parks and protect more than 25 million acres of forest within the Congo Basin," said Powell.

Powell said the Bush administration has adopted an environmental policy linked to poverty reduction, good government, and sound economic and trade policies.

"The new approach that we are taking is about creating conditions for growth that will help people lift themselves out of poverty and do it in a way that will sustain development, using the Earth's resources, but not abusing the Earth's resources," Powell said.

Washington area youngsters involved in environmental activism, members of the Washington diplomatic corps, and representatives of the legislative and executive branches participated in the department's Earth Day event. Manufacturers of "green" products displayed items such as building materials made from recycled materials, solar-powered ovens, and electric and hybrid vehicles.

Following is the transcript of Powell's remarks:

Remarks at 2004 Earth Day "Improving Our World Together"
Environmental Business Exhibition

Secretary Colin L. Powell
Washington, DC
April 22, 2004

(10:30 a.m. EDT)

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, thank you so very much, Joy and Joshua, for that great performance. I know how much you worked on it. I'm sure that you were up late last night with your family members, your parents, rehearsing and rehearsing and rehearsing. And I know that you are tremendously relieved that it is now over and you can relax.

(Laughter.)

Yes, it is true. I was a kid, once, but not like you, I can tell you that.

(Laughter.)

It is a great pleasure to have you here. On behalf of all of us assembled, I salute these two wonderful young people and your fellow students from Stewart-Hobson Middle School. I salute you for your commitment to the environment and to building a better world for all people. You are the most important people here today because after all, in due course, this Earth will be an inheritance that we are giving to you for you to preserve - - the only Earth we have, the only world that God gave to us, one that we are responsible for protecting.

I'm so pleased to have this opportunity to participate in Earth Day and it may seem a little unusual that the Secretary of State would do so, but also a former soldier. What does he know about Earth Day?

But you'd be surprised. In my years in the military, we went out of our way to preserve the lands on our bases. When I was at Fort Carson, Colorado, we had a great environmental program or conservation program, and the funny thing about it was, all of the animals -- all of the animals at Fort Carson -- knew that a tank would not hurt you.

(Laughter.)

We went after targets and we trained a lot, but it was the most unusual thing to go running down a range in an M1A1 tank swinging that gun back and forth, getting ready to look at a target with a bunch of squirrels and chipmunks and foxes just watching as you went by, knowing that they were in no danger. We went to a lot of effort in the military to preserve our land, even as we used it prepare for the awful possibility of war. One story I always was telling is when I was a Corps Commander in Germany, and one day my Third Armored Division Commander came in to see me and said he had a terrible problem. I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, the Greens Party have just put a number of trees right in the middle of our

tank range, and we're going to go out there tomorrow and roll over them." I said, "No, no, no, no, no. You're going to do many things tomorrow, but you're not going to go roll over a bunch of trees that have been put on our tank range."

"Well, what shall we do?" I said, "Very simple. Go out there late tonight when it's really dark and dig the trees up, and then bring the trees to our housing area. And we'll plant all the trees in the housing area, and then we'll invite the Greens to come join us for an Earth Day celebration. We will dedicate these trees to our families and all of the others living in our housing areas. There are ways to turn this into an advantage from a disadvantage."

So I believe in Earth Day. I believe in what we try to do. I believe in all of the programs that we have with countries around the world to celebrate this day and to celebrate our efforts.

I'm so pleased that you are all here today because, in addition to our student VIPs, we have distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of the Legislative and Executive Branch of our Government, nongovernmental groups and members of the corporate community. And I add my welcome to all of you in joining us for this Earth Day celebration.

Our Earth Day greeting this year is a bit more conventional than last year's. On Earth Day 2003, our guest was not me, really, but it was my good friend, dear friend, Jane Goodall, the famous primatologist, whom we all know so well, and she opened up our Earth Day celebration by giving a full-throated chimpanzee scream.

I will not give a full-throated chimpanzee scream, but there is nothing like the enthusiasm of the chimpanzee who is really happy to greet you. We are usually a little more restrained, however, here at the Department of State.

The first Earth Day was held 34 years ago today, as you all know. 20 million Americans took part in the observances. The grassroots movement launched in 1970 is still going strong; and Americans can be proud that we inspired similar efforts in countries all around the globe.

Here, in the United States, that first Earth Day dramatically raised environmental awareness and engendered a vibrant period of lawmaking and institution building. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the President's Council on Environmental Quality were born at that time, and as a result of those efforts.

The National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts were passed by the United States Congress and signed into law as evidence of America's commitment to a better world, to a cleaner world, to a world we would all be proud of living in.

Many of these pioneering measures were the first of their kind, not only

here in America, but the first of their kind in the world. Finding and implementing solutions to the world's tough environmental problems is our collective responsibility, the world's collective responsibility.

As the name of this exhibition you'll be seeing suggests, all of us are here to commit ourselves to improving our world together. This Earth Day, we recognize in particular, the important role that businesses can play. The wonderful exhibits in this hall show how our entrepreneurs around the country and our planet, all around the planet, can profit, how it can benefit them when these corporations operate in environmentally sound ways.

And I have no doubt that the Earth-friendly, American-made, cutting-edge products and services on display will generate a lot of green, both the monetary kind of green and the environmental kind of green. Businesses do well when businesses do good.

We all recognize that the global environmental challenges we face today are too great just for governments, too great just for businesses or just for nongovernmental groups, each of us to tackle alone. We must work together. We must work in partnership to deal with these problems. Decades of experience have shown that wonderful things can be accomplished for our planet, for our Earth, when we all act together.

Experience also has shown that environmental problems are the most severe in places where other serious problems abound. The environment tends to be at greatest risk in regions where conflict, chaos and humanitarian crises rage. Environmental degradation tends to be worse in countries where governments are corrupt and unaccountable to citizens, and in societies where citizens suffer from illiteracy, from illness, from hunger and from hopelessness.

Indeed, protecting the environment is intricately linked to our other efforts to building a safer, more democratic and prosperous world. President Bush is strongly committed to fighting environmental degradation, especially in developing countries. He is absolutely determined that the United States will always be a strong leader in forging a new international consensus on development assistance. The new approach that we are taking is about creating conditions for growth that will help people lift themselves out of poverty and do it in a way that will sustain development, using the Earth's resources, but not abusing the Earth's resources.

The new approach makes critical links between sustainable development and good government, sound economic and trade policies and wise stewardship of the environment. Partnerships among governments, the private sector and nongovernmental organizations will be key to the success of our new approach to development.

A good example of the new approach is the White Water to Blue Water Partnership, which is aimed at protecting the Caribbean's watersheds and coastal ecosystems. Recently, under the partnership, more than 700 public and private sector representatives from Caribbean nations came together in Miami. They identified ways to cooperate in protecting the basin's

ecosystem while ensuring the region's sustained development. Many promising collaborations came out of this conference.

Just to cite one example. The United States business, [inaudible] joined forces with the Nature Conservancy, the United Nations Foundation, and the nongovernmental organization Coastal America, and committed \$750,000 to project -- to protect a project and to create a project on the Yucatan Peninsula's Sian Kaan Wetland. We are very pleased to welcome Coastal America to our exhibit today.

If this promising experiment works in the wider Caribbean, the United States is committed to helping introduce the model to other regions of the world as well.

The United States-led Congo Basin Forest Partnership is another example of close public-private collaboration for the environment. We are working to establish national networks of protected areas across Central Africa. Our shared objective simply is to safeguard one of the two largest intact tropical forests that exist in that part of the world.

And essential element of the effort is giving local people a stake in the forest by promoting sustaining harvesting and offering them livelihoods, such as eco-tourism. Sustainable harvesting, eco-tourism, taken together, can help us use the forest, but also protect the forest.

Over four years, the United States will contribute \$53 million for training programs, infrastructure, and management and enforcement regimes. Under the auspices of the Forest Partnership, we seek to develop as many as 27 national parks and protect more than 25 million acres of forest within the Congo Basin.

The White Water to Blue Water Partnership and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership are only a few of the dozens of innovative efforts we are advancing to build a healthier, more hopeful world for all of God's creatures.

My friends, ladies and gentlemen, on this Earth Day 2004, President Bush and his team remain deeply committed to working with all of you. Together, we will forge powerful public-private partnerships across the globe for the sake of our flora, our fauna, and above all, for the sake of our future.

So thank you all for being with us today, and now let's enjoy the exhibits. Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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