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**Statement to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,**  
**Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations,**  
**Democracy and Human Rights**  
**September 19, 2007**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to you and the subcommittee today. I am proud to report on the recent decision by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to release Everglades National Park from the list of the List of World Heritage in Danger. The delegates reached this decision unanimously and affirmed their confidence in the actions underway by the United States, the State of Florida, and many partners to ensure the future of the Park. As I will describe, the international community began suggesting upgrading the status of the Park four years ago and we stand by the decision to do so this year.

The United States was the first country to sign and ratify the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The U.S. has strongly supported the World Heritage program ever

since that time, including the 19 years we were absent from UNESCO, from 1985 to 2003. During those years, when the Department of State played an observer role in UNESCO, on World Heritage issues, the National Park Service represented U.S. interests.

After the United States rejoined UNESCO, and the U.S. accredited an Ambassador as Permanent Representative to UNESCO, the Department of State resumed its normal role in cooperating with the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service in leading U.S. delegations to World Heritage Committee meetings. Since 2005, when the U.S. became a member of the World Heritage Committee, the Departments of State and the Interior have assumed the role of co-heads of delegation to that Committee. The Department of the Interior and the National Park Service provide leadership as required under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Department of State provides overall guidance to our delegations, and has the lead on issues relating to UNESCO budget and management, negotiations with foreign delegations within the World Heritage Committee, and on foreign policy aspects of the World Heritage Committee's work. The World Heritage Committee is a technical body, and so we look to the

Department of the Interior to take the lead on issues involving inscription and conservation of World Heritage sites.

The United States serves as one of the 21 members of the World Heritage Committee, which is the governing body of UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The U.S. was elected to a six-year term in 2005, but as has become customary we agreed to serve only four years of the six-year term. The principal purpose of the Committee is to identify and help conserve the world's most valuable heritage sites.

The World Heritage Committee meets annually to consider reports on the status of existing World Heritage sites and to consider recommendations for inscribing new sites on the World Heritage List. Properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List must demonstrate "outstanding universal value" by satisfying at least one of ten formal evaluation criteria. In addition, the Committee maintains a list of World Heritage sites threatened by natural disasters or political crises. The List of World Heritage in Danger is the first step toward loss of World Heritage status. States with World Heritage sites on the List in Danger are eligible for emergency relief through UNESCO's World Heritage Fund. The United

States has never sought international assistance for conservation of any of its World Heritage sites. It is the position of the U.S. that a site can be added to or removed from the list only with the consent of the member state where a site is located.

The Committee receives independent evaluations from two advisory bodies. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) reviews natural sites. Evaluations of cultural sites are prepared by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The World Heritage Committee is not bound by the recommendations of the advisory bodies. Not infrequently, the Committee's decisions are based on its own understanding of the facts, or other considerations. And expert opinion is not always unanimous, of course. At its most recent meeting—in Christchurch, New Zealand, June 22-July 2, 2007—the Committee's decision to defer inscription of a site nominated by Cambodia, the temple of Preah Vihear, was contrary to the recommendation of the advisory group. And in the case of Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Honduras), the World Conservation Union recommended that the site be maintained on the List in Danger, but the

Committee determined that there had been enough recent progress to justify its removal.

The Department of State, in advance of each meeting of the World Heritage Committee, conducts interagency consultations with the Department of the Interior and other stakeholders based on the agenda for the upcoming meeting prepared by UNESCO's World Heritage Center. This agenda lists sites which member states have recommended for inclusion in the World Heritage List, and includes the expert opinions of the advisory bodies and the Center's recommendations for action. The Department of State prepares a guidance document tracking with this agenda and providing the U.S. position on each listed item. However, member states are free to introduce new items to the World Heritage Committee at the meeting itself, and frequently do so.

At its recent meeting in Christchurch, the Committee inscribed 22 new World Heritage sites and also de-listed one site. These actions bring the total number of World Heritage sites to 851, sponsored by 141 states parties.

The Committee revised the List of World Heritage in Danger by adding three sites: the Galápagos Islands (Ecuador), Niokolo-Koba National Park (Senegal), and Ancient Samarra (Iraq). Four sites were removed from the List in Danger: Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Honduras), Royal Palaces of Abomey (Benin), Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), and, as you know, Everglades National Park in Florida (U.S.A.).

Everglades National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979 and added to the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1993. In 1993, the National Park Service, representing the U.S., requested that the Everglades be so listed. In the past three annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee, foreign delegations have with increasing frequency urged the U.S. delegations in informal consultations to seek removal of the Everglades from the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger. These delegations have cited the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan enacted by Congress in 2000, arguably the world's most ambitious conservation project, as the basis for such sentiments.

At the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Christchurch, many foreign delegations again urged the U.S. to request delisting of the Everglades. Our U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO determined that support for such an action was sufficient to ensure success, and so advised the Department of the Interior members of the delegation. The delegation then decided to proceed with a formal request for delisting. The advisory group, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), noted achievements in preservation and restoration of the Everglades, but recommended that the Everglades remain on the List in Danger pending further study of the conservation measures underway. However, every Committee member who spoke on the issue (India, Kenya, Lithuania, New Zealand, Israel, Canada, Madagascar, Chile, Benin, and Spain) favored removal of the Everglades from the List in Danger. Several Committee members hailed the U.S. effort as a model for other nations. A unanimous decision was then taken to remove the Everglades from the list. The major practical consequence of the Everglades' removal from the List in Danger is that Everglades National Park will be required to submit annual reports, gauging progress against certain benchmarks established in 2006. The Committee also requested that the U.S., in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and the IUCN,

develop a statement of the “desired state of conservation” for the site. The next U.S. report is due in February 2008.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions.