

Speech by Ambassador David Welch
Completion of the Cairo Air Improvement Project
Cairo House, Ministry of Environment
March 24, 2004

Theme: U.S. assistance has empowered the Government of Egypt to improve air quality to safeguard the health and productivity of Cairenes.

Good evening. My congratulations to Minister Mamdouh Riad and the Ministry of Environment on this impressive and modern facility, Cairo House.

Sincere thanks to Prime Minister Atef Ebeid and to the officials whose support was indispensable for the accomplishments of the Cairo Air Improvement Project:

- Minister Riad
- General Habib Al-Adly, Minister of Interior, and his representative this evening, General Maher Mekawil
- Engineer Sameh Fahmy, Minister of Petroleum
- General Moustafa Abdel Qader, Minister of Local Development
- Dr. Abdel Rehim Hashem Shehata, Governor of Cairo
- Counselor Adly Hussein, Governor of Qalyoubiya
- Counselor Mahmoud Aboul Leil Rashed, Governor of Giza
- Engineer Nabil El Mazny, Chairman of the Cairo Transit Authority;
and
- Engineer Shehata Nadim, Chairman of the Greater Cairo Bus Company.

As we thank all of you for your hard work as individuals, we are grateful for the strides that we all have made as partners. The Government of Egypt has confronted the problems of air quality head-on. Bringing all the important players to work together, the Cairo Air Improvement Project has implemented measures to reduce the levels of particulates and lead that have the most serious impact on human health in Greater Cairo. In key areas including clean vehicle fuels, vehicle emissions testing, lead pollution abatement, air monitoring, education and awareness, together we have made great strides, and many more are in your grasp.

Air pollution is a health issue, and it is a quality of life issue. But it is also an economic issue.

Air pollution causes and aggravates respiratory ailments, reducing the productivity of those affected as well as their families; and placing a burden on the health care system and the society that supports it. Poor air quality can be a deterrent to tourists and foreign investors.

But the flip side, of course, is that cleaning up air pollution costs money. The governments of Egypt and the United States recognized that fact as we jointly identified development priorities, creating the Cairo Air Improvement Project in 1995, funded by 60 million dollars from the American people and overseen by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Beyond the financial considerations, in a large and complicated society such as Greater Cairo, moving toward a solution brings technical challenges, institutional challenges, and policy questions. The accomplishments that we celebrate today are a testament to the fact that the decision-makers in the Government of Egypt – the ministers and governors that I named at the beginning of my remarks – possessed the will and the determination to join together and form compromises.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Ebeid, whose commitment to the environment is longstanding and demonstrated, the leaders came together because they all place a priority on improving the quality of Cairo's air and quality of life for the men, women, and children who breathe it. These achievements are theirs.

As we mark the formal conclusion of the Cairo Air Improvement Project, also known as CAIP ["cape"], we arrive at a new beginning. As we celebrate our accomplishments, we are also preparing for the challenges to come. Together we have laid the foundation upon which the Government of Egypt – along with the private sector, civil society, and individuals – can push forward for long-lasting improvements in air quality.

Let me just highlight a few areas where success lays ahead but is within your grasp.

- One of the achievements of this project was that it set up a network of **air monitors** throughout Greater Cairo in 1998, with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency taking over operation in mid-2002. The sampling equipment and analysis provided by the U.S. have demonstrated positive trends in lead levels and air pollution episodes over the course of the project. The data have also been valuable for environmental education and awareness programs.

That leads us to the next step. The air monitoring data provides reliable forecasts of what air quality Cairo will experience in the near future. Shared with the public, these forecasts can be a powerful tool for getting the media and the public involved in improving air quality. Forecasting will also show the Egyptian public that its government is actively involved in dealing with the issue of air quality.

We commend the Minister of Environment for his proactive approach on public awareness and his recent commitment to use the monitoring data to educate the public about air quality issues on a periodic basis.

We will continue to work with the Government of Egypt in this key area. Under the Egyptian Environmental Policy Program, USAID is working with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency to develop a national air quality strategy and information dissemination plan. We anticipate that implementation will have begun by the end of July, using the early warning system and other tools provided by CAIP.

- Diesel fuel combustion is a major contributor to the air pollution problem, but Cairo's public bus companies are definitely part of the solution. The United States purchased fifty buses for Cairo's two public transit fleets that run on clean-burning **compressed natural gas** or CNG. But it was the transit companies that, at their own expense, built dedicated maintenance garages -- the largest CNG garages in the world outside the United States, with room for more than 150 buses each -- and provided the necessary staff.

This is proof of the public sector's commitment to tackling this problem, and it is extremely encouraging. Let me express our appreciation again for the Cairo Transit Authority and the Greater Cairo Bus Company.

We are hopeful that the Government of Egypt will continue putting more CNG buses on the road. Thanks to CAIP, the United States and its Egyptian

partners have put the necessary elements in place to allow the national CNG bus program to expand. That includes fueling facilities, computerized maintenance systems, skilled personnel, and a state of the art research facility, Misr Labs, as well as national safety standards developed by the Egyptian Organization of Standardization under the leadership of the of the Ministry of Industry.

- The 1.5 million vehicles in Greater Cairo are major contributors to air pollution. **Vehicle emissions testing** was an ambitious aspect of the project. But it has been a source of joy to see that this important part of the solution is moving forward with strong momentum. For that, we owe thanks to the Ministry of Interior, its traffic departments, and the governors.

- Once the partners decided that vehicle emissions testing would be linked to license renewal, the Ministry of Interior very quickly issued the necessary decree.

- The Governorates of Giza and Qalyoubia came forward and volunteered to pioneer this process. Governor Adly Hussein of Qalyoubia and Governor Mahmoud Aboul Leil Rashed of Giza, along with the governorate councils, really should be commended for taking the initiative.

- With U.S.-funded equipment, the testing program was launched in those governorates in June 2003, and it has been so successful that other governorates have volunteered to join at their own expense.

- The Ministries of Interior and Environment responded by putting together a mechanism that will finance the necessary equipment for the new governorates.

So one good thing continues to lead to another.

Governor Abdel Rehim Hashem Shehata of Cairo also has announced that vehicle emissions testing will be implemented in Cairo Governorate. This is a truly important step in the battle against air pollution, considering that Cairo Governorate is home to more than half of the cars in all of Egypt. The United States responded by purchasing equipment worth half a million dollars, as we had for Giza and Qalyoubia. We are hopeful that Governor Shehata will soon invite us to join him in launching this program in the traffic departments of Cairo Governorate.

- I will conclude by commending the Government of Egypt for its very important decision to relocate all polluting industries outside of the metropolitan area. Other speakers will address the progress that the CAIP partners achieved in reducing **lead smelter pollution** in Shoubra Al-Kheima. I just want to underscore that while CAIP is ending, U.S. environmental assistance continues. USAID is assisting the Government of Egypt in drawing up guidelines for the cleanup or "remediation" that will improve the quality of life for Shoubra Al-Kheima. And, under USAID's new environmental project called "Livelihood and Incomes From the Environment" or "LIFE" for short, we will finance the actual remediation of the most polluted smelter sites in Shoubra Al-Kheima that pose the greatest risks. It's worth noting that this creates a business opportunity, as the cleanup will be performed by Egyptian contractors.

In closing, let me again congratulate you all for the tremendous efforts undertaken in this extraordinary project. We salute Egypt's leaders for having made the commitment to press on with this important work. The long-term programs that we have put in motion together will help you to achieve continued success.