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CANADA SIGNS CONVENTION ON LRTAP GENEVA, NOVEMBER 13, 1979

A step in the direction of addressing the global environmental problems associated with long-range trans-boundary air borne pollution (LRTAP) will be taken today when, the Minister of the Environment, John Fraser, on behalf of Canada, signs the first international convention on LRTAP. The signing, at a high level meeting on the protection of the environment, takes place in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe, a 36-nation regional grouping which includes the countries of Eastern and Western Europe and North America. Most member countries are expected to sign.

The accord represents a significant diplomatic achievement given the variety of competing interests found within the Commission. It is seen as one of the most striking examples of East-West co-operation envisaged in the 1975 Helsinki Agreement on security and co-operation in Europe.

The Convention falls short of what Canada is seeking in its current discussions with the U.S.A. on the bilateral dimensions of the problem. It does not, for example, require a specific reduction of air pollution, although it does expect of signators a serious effort to undertake research and to exchange scientific information leading to an eventual amelioration of the problem. The Convention also represents an advance in international environmental law, a subject to which Canada is giving high priority. Perhaps most important, it gives impetus to the search for politically and economically acceptable means by which to approach an insidious environmental problem of major dimensions both in Europe and North America.