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Global Environment Facility

Speech

The GEF and CBD: Responding to the biodiversity crisis

Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson

Global Environment Facility

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Good Afternoon,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Just a few days ago the nations of the world celebrated the life of the U.S. civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr. who famously said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Today as we start to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity we are off to a good start. Decision makers from all over the world have made it clear here today that stopping biodiversity loss DOES matter; that it requires action, and strong commitment.

To help move us forward we are working closely with the CBD and other partners including UNESCO to raise awareness within the global community through public events, various interactive communication and outreach activities, as well as an innovative branding exercise to highlight how much of an impact biodiversity has in our daily lives. The IYB exhibition that will be launched today is one of these initiatives with UNESCO and CBD.

We know from Copenhagen that consensus continues to be elusive when nations are faced with some of the world's biggest environmental challenges. But make no mistake that citizens of the world, rich or poor, are putting pressure on their leaders to protect the planet for future generations. And this includes biodiversity: protecting nature is also protecting people.

We have been hearing for all long time the inconvenient truth on biodiversity. Despite an agreed global target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss, evidence shows we are going in the opposite direction.

As the financial mechanism of the CBD, the Global Environment Facility is working closely with our partners in the public and private sectors to remind our donors of an important and simple message. That is, safeguarding nature promotes synergies that generate multiple global benefits: protecting and sustainably using biodiversity will help maintain the goods and services that human rely for their living. These actions in turn put countries in a better position to adapt to and mitigate climate change, which can then generate jobs and a better standard of living.

Since 1991, as the largest contributor of biodiversity conservation in developing countries, the GEF has invested about \$2.8 billion in direct financing and

leveraged another \$8 billion for 790 projects that address the loss of globally significant biodiversity in more than 155 countries. Behind these numbers much has been accomplished – let me give you a snapshot of what I mean.

- We have been recognized as the critical donor that catalyzed the achievement of the target of 10% of the world's terrestrial areas under protection which covered investments in 2,302 protected areas spanning 634 million hectares, 700 globally threatened species, and resulted in 30 billion tons of stored carbon.

Yet, we and others need to do more because there is a lot of unfinished business.

Expanding on the synergy between biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction and emissions mitigation through sustainable forest management is a priority for our next replenishment. Further, we recognize that biodiversity conservation must also be mainstreamed into all development sectors; growing pressures on food security will trigger agriculture expansion that will force us to become much more proactive in reconciling biodiversity with productive landscapes.

Anemic financial commitments continue to be a key obstacle toward achieving the Convention of Biological Diversity's three objectives and the 2010

Biodiversity Target: the funding gap ranges from 10 to 50 billion dollars per year globally.

Not so coincidentally, tens of billions of dollars are also needed into fight and adapt to climate change. A month out of Copenhagen we need to find ways to narrow this funding gap in a targeted and synergistic way.

At the GEF throughout our 18 year history experience has shown us that a healthy environment spurs economic opportunities which generate value and create win-win opportunities for donors and recipient countries looking to build sustainable development portfolios.

Two examples are our investments in forests and oceans, both which are natural carbon “sinks” that if managed wisely can mitigate climate change, generate jobs and reduce species loss.

With forests, GEF is the largest financier of forest conservation and management, having invested \$1.5 billion supplemented by more than \$4.5 billion from partners. We have protected 100 million hectares of forest through projects and with our next round of funding we will be able to do even more.

On a global scale deforestation contributes to 15% of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the entire transport sector. Investing in forests helps address multiple environment issues including climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation.

Along those lines GEF's experience in securing blue carbon sinks, which support one half of the world's fisheries and nourish almost one half of our planet's population, is being recognized as contributing to climate mitigation in the same way terrestrial forests do. It is estimated that at least one-third of the CO₂ entering the atmosphere is channeled through marine environments so it is critical to keep these ecosystems healthy.

The bottom line here is that the GEF as a unique, networked institution with its many partners is poised to make smart investment choices that help countries secure natural resources—whether they be forests, land, coast or ocean to deliver multiple environmental and economic benefits.

At the end of the day, if we truly want to foster the kind of innovation we need to get concrete results, we should look to strengthen and increase GEF's own resources. A stronger GEF will also mean a better chance of advancing our collective goal to protect the world's resources for future generations. By establishing mutually rewarding partnerships and being creative in the ways in which we raise and employ funds, we will, no doubt, make measurable progress in building a sustainable future for us all.

Thank you.