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Opening Remarks

Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson

Global Environment Facility

**GEF Ministerial Consultative Meeting
February, 16–19, 2010
Cotonou**

Ministers,

GEF Agency Coordinators,

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to be in Cotonou today to discuss the major environmental challenges facing West Africa. I would like to express my appreciation to Benin for hosting this event again and, in particular, to the Minister for proposing and facilitating this meeting.

At our last meeting here in August 2008, we launched a program aimed at making it easier for West Africa to gain access to the resources of the Global Environment Facility.

You will no doubt recall that at that time, in the midst of the fourth GEF replenishment, we assessed the use of available resources for the countries of the region and noted with concern that there were very few projects in the preparation phase. We were extremely frustrated to see that despite the vast

needs that existed, we were unable to commit financial resources that were actually available. At that time, we made a joint decision to implement a strategic program for the region that would have a climate change focal area as well as a biodiversity focal area.

This decision completely reversed the situation. I am happy to report today that all parties have honored their commitments: the countries, the Agencies, the GEF Council, and the GEF Secretariat. The programs have been approved within a six-month period. In 14 months, 40 projects have been validated, a figure that represents a commitment of US\$68 million or close to 90 percent of projected resources. I personally signed them all, and we are now in the operational phase of project implementation.

At our previous meeting, we made two other important decisions. We agreed to meet at a later date to monitor the progress of programs and, with a view to the fifth GEF replenishment, we thought it advisable to review jointly the extent to which the programmatic approach could spur implementation of our projects. This is precisely the purpose of our meeting. Today, we have three objectives, namely to:

1. Assess the progress made with programs;

2. Take note of the lessons learned from this experience; and
3. Jointly explore the advisability of new programs for West Africa, taking this experience into account as well as the progress made with negotiations for the fifth GEF replenishment.

Listed on our agenda are specific sessions related to these points and we will have ample time to hold detailed discussions on all these subjects.

At this juncture, I would like to underscore a number of issues that I consider critical in the context of discussions on the fifth GEF replenishment.

These discussions are well underway, as are negotiations on new resources for two funds devoted to adaptation—the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). We expect to hold a final replenishment meeting in March 2010 in Rome. The major reforms that we launched during the GEF-4 and the success of such initiatives as the programmatic approaches are positive areas that inspire confidence on the part of donors in the GEF's capacity to meet global environmental challenges.

In the context of this replenishment for the 2010–2014 period, new ideas are under review. They cover three major topics that I will address in detail at another session: (1) strengthening links between the GEF and international environmental conventions; (2) improving alignment between GEF programming and country programming; and (3) enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the GEF. We must carefully assess the consequences of the foregoing during discussions related to a new regional approach.

First point: extensive changes will be made to the resource allocation framework. Each country will now be able to receive its own allocation in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation. There will no longer be any confusion with respect to group allocations.

Second point: we will improve country ownership of the GEF. We will provide financial and technical support to interested countries to enable them to hold national and interministerial consultations aimed at identifying the priority projects that they wish to submit for GEF financing. This approach is, in my view, an extremely appropriate way to ensure that other parties do not determine your priorities in your stead, and I would recommend that greater attention be paid to this issue.

You will note that we intend to further strengthen the role and responsibility of each country in the GEF framework. However, this should in no way make us neglect the importance of a regional approach, the reason for our meeting here today. There are, in my view, two major challenges:

First and foremost are the issues that are common to several countries, particularly with respect to the environment. One such example is access to energy, which is a regional issue, or the issue of forests and rivers that know no borders. In order to maximize impact, we must endeavor to address these issues jointly, by establishing the regional level as the level for coordination and the country level as the level at which action will be taken.

Then there are issues that can, through collective action, provide us with a host of environmental benefits. When we invest one dollar in a forest, we are preserving biodiversity, saving coal, limiting climate change at the local level, and protecting the incomes of the local populations who earn a living from the forest. I believe, and particularly with respect to this region, that we must launch more projects that will help maximize these benefits and synergies.

We must therefore seek regional and thematic synergies. What are the common challenges that you face? What are the common guidelines that would help meet these challenges? How can these guidelines be aligned with the country projects that you will select during country consultations?

The foregoing encapsulates the main challenge facing this meeting and the questions to which we will, I hope, find solutions.

In any event, I am very optimistic about the future, because we all, without exception, performed well during the preparation of the program underway. Commitments have been honored, which bodes well for the future. I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for this achievement and to express the hope that we will continue to work together to move the agenda forward.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without noting that preparations for the GEF Assembly in Punta del Este in Uruguay are proceeding smoothly. We are expecting strong country participation and frank discussions that will help bring the GEF even closer to countries during the fifth replenishment phase. I therefore urge you to mark the date May 25–27, 2010 in your calendars.

Thank you.