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**Opening statement  
at the Civil Society Forum**

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**Global Environment Facility**

**Civil Society Forum  
GEF Assembly  
Punta del Este, Uruguay  
Monday, May 24, 2010, at 9 a.m.**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Punta Del Este! This is the first time that the Assembly is meeting in South America and I wish to thank the Uruguayan authorities for inviting us to this beautiful country. Indeed, I have the feeling that the guide books do not do it justice. I hope that those of you making your first visit to Uruguay will find time to see the tourist sites when our important discussions have concluded.

Even if you are workaholics, I urge you to spend at least one day in Montevideo, a thriving modern city that has retained the soul of what South America used to be. Everything works out – the weather is bad today, but when we have finished the sun will shine and you will be able to go forth with our backpack and keep promoting the GEF.

But enough about tourism. Before turning to the agenda item, the GEF NGO network, I wish to greet the local civil society organizations represented here today: the program that you have drafted represents a crucial stage in the expansion and strengthening of our ties during the four years of our next replenishment cycle – GEF-5. My thanks to you all.

As you know, we have many reasons for satisfaction today: over 30 countries have pledged resources in a record amount of US\$4.25 billion for GEF-5, our next funding cycle which will run until 2014. Allow me to say a few words about this: representing an increase of 52 percent over GEF-4, this amount reflects a firm commitment to the GEF in the current financial context. It is also a significant first multilateral step toward fulfillment of the commitments made in Copenhagen on climate change and those included in the other main international instruments on the environment, such as the Convention on biodiversity, which will be showcased in Nagoya later this year.

When some of you invited me to Copenhagen to speak to the NGOs, I covered two main topics: firstly, how to strengthen the GEF machinery and, secondly, how this machinery can have more positive effects for clients and be results-oriented and cost-effective. With your help, we obviously reached a kind of consensus on those two topics and this is reflected in the level of replenishment of our resources. So we must now get to work.

Our donors decided on important reforms that will change the look of the GEF when they are implemented.

The first reform – assistance to requesting countries with the design of a four-year business plan – is on the right track. We are working on the recommendations of our Evaluation Office, which found that country ownership of projects is enhanced when national strategic frameworks provide a road map for GEF-funded activities.

We are also studying how to expand the GEF machinery and make it more effective. To this end, a great deal must be done at the national level, such as:

- Providing access to a larger number of qualified entities;
- Improving our program design;
- Streamlining the project cycle;
- Making resource allocation more flexible;
- Enhancing cooperation with civil society organizations and the private sector in particular; and
- Implementing the GEF results-based management framework.

This “to do” list is not exhaustive, but you see what I am getting at!

I am sure that everyone here wants to know how we are also going to work better with you.

The GEF-5 replenishment would not have been as successful without your support. And I am convinced that you should all be an integral part of the national steering committees for GEF operations, which will guide the preparation of the GEF national action plans that I mentioned a moment ago. The GEF will also fund the participation of a representative of civil society organizations in each national delegation participating in the regional workshops. We hope that these initiatives will bring us closer together and promote more effective information sharing between all GEF partners. They will also ensure that civil society organizations play a more active part in project identification, preparation, and execution than was the case in GEF-4.

Lastly, I should like to remind you all that when we talk about the GEF, we do not mean the Secretariat, one country, or one agency. We mean all of you in this room. Civil society organizations helped to establish the GEF and are helping it to perform its mission: investing locally for positive effects on the global environment.

Since it came into being, the GEF has constantly been increasing its financial aid in support of initiatives and actions adopted by local populations and civil society organizations under its microfinancing program: today it is active in 122 countries, supporting over 12,000 projects all over the world.

You are also aware that we are revamping the Small Grants Programme so that the assistance given to each national program can be better targeted according to the degree of maturity of each of these programs, and we are of course monitoring the progress of this reform.

Before leaving to attend the Council meeting, I should like to draw your attention to our new publication entitled “The GEF and Civil Society Organizations: A strategic partnership”, which highlights the investments that we have made in environment preservation projects originated by local populations and civil society and the progress that we have achieved together and of which we are proud. We are glad that our strategic links with civil society organizations are moving toward a fruitful partnership. And so I

look forward to hearing your proposals, ideas, and criticisms at the conclusion of today's meeting, with a view to our collaboration during GEF-5.

I therefore declare open the GEF Civil Society Forum and hope that your discussions and deliberations will be fruitful.