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## **Keynote Address**

**Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson  
Global Environment Facility**

**Opening of the Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology,  
Montpellier, Corum Conference Center,  
May 21, 2012**

Madam Mayor,

Madam Director,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to be with you here today for this Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Edmond Dounias for his invitation and his investment in making this event possible.

It so happens that this is the second time we have met with Mayor H el ene Mandroux here in Montpellier to discuss the issues of indigenous peoples and their role in protecting and managing the environment. The first time was at the Convention on Biodiversity in January; and now today at this Congress, which is being held for the first time in France.

It is surely no coincidence that these subjects are being addressed once again in Montpellier, a city and community focused on development and international issues.

I come before you today as Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility. I should explain, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the GEF, that it is a financial organization that assists developing countries and countries with economies in transition by providing grants for projects that will enable them to honor their international commitments to improving the global environment. The GEF is, in fact, the largest public funder projects designed to improve the global environment. Our work spans the international conventions on the environment, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and persistent organic pollutants.

The GEF operates on a four-year cycle. We are currently at the mid-point of the 5th GEF cycle (2010-2014), with funding totaling \$4.25 billion. We unite 182 countries in partnership with international institutions as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector. GEF has a Scientific Council and a network of NGOs. Since its creation 21 years ago, the GEF has provided US\$10.5 billion in grants and leveraged \$51 billion in co-financing for over 2,700 projects in 165 countries. Through our Small Grants Programme, the GEF has also financed over 14,000 small projects totaling

\$634 million, the large majority of these small grants being assigned to rural indigenous communities

The way we work with indigenous people, not only in the projects we finance, but also in the governance of our institution, reflects my determination that the global environmental movement recognize the importance of this issue.

We do this not because it is fashionable or trendy, or simply to make ourselves feel good. We do it most of all because it makes good sense.

Indeed, we now have sufficient evidence showing that it is less painful to invest today to protect the environment than to finance corrective measures tomorrow. In the same way, the least costly approach to protecting natural resources is to work with local communities, including indigenous peoples, and to rely, for instance, on traditional know-how.

One of the common elements of all agreements on the environment is maintaining a range of solutions for both existing and potential problems. Protecting local and ancestral knowledge is thus not only a way for us to fulfill our current mission and protect the environment, it also preserves options and solutions for the future.

Throughout my time in office, I have made sure that the issue of indigenous peoples is included in every reform undertaken to improve the GEF's performance, its management, and visibility. More important, we have made the process of making decisions more inclusive, which has contributed to a better sense of ownership of the GEF in the beneficiary countries. I am convinced that the policy that we have implemented to strengthen the participation of indigenous peoples has permanently enriched the GEF and enhanced its standing.

As evidence of this, I am pleased to note that more indigenous groups are now participating in the network of NGOs affiliated with the GEF. But we have gone further than simply welcoming representatives of civil society, including indigenous peoples, in meetings of the GEF Council and Assembly. We have also adopted a more resolute policy so as to ensure their engagement and respect their rights. The various elements of this set of policies will be presented in the next meeting of the GEF Council. Starting in June 2012, ten new agencies will be accredited as GEF Agencies. This expansion, which will provide them with direct access to GEF resources, will encompass both national agencies and NGOs. I believe that this step

forward will have an extremely positive impact in terms of greater participation by indigenous groups in GEF projects.

Our commitment to working at the community level to improve the global environment is exemplified by the dimension of local and indigenous community involvement in the large-scale projects we finance. Allow me to cite but one example: in Brazil we are financing a project in the Amazon that is producing significant positive impacts on water and forestry resources, and thus greatly benefiting local populations.

These are the very people who most depend upon these natural resources. The first phase of this far-reaching, twelve-year program began in 2003 and ended in 2009. The second phase, totaling \$18 million with an additional \$30 million in co-financing from KFW, is currently under way.

This substantial program has already led to the creation of 25 million hectares of new protected areas – an area nearly the size of Great Britain. The project is helping to preserve the biodiversity of the world's largest rain forest. By the time it ends, it will encompass an area 50 percent larger than all the land set aside for U.S. national parks over the past 130 years.

But that is not all. The Amazon project will also contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. To give you an idea, a study has shown that

the protected and reserved areas created between 2003 and 2007 under this project prevented the deforestation of 237,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Amazon is not a desert, devoid of inhabitants. Nearly half the reserves we are talking about in this project are called “sustainable development reserves,” managed by local and indigenous communities. In the Amazon, as we have seen in so many of our projects, environmental, economic, and social benefits are linked. It also demonstrates how we make the connection between global benefits and local issues.

This brings me directly to the general theme of the 13th Congress, which is: *“Cultural diversity and biological diversity for sustainable development: Exploring the past to build up the future.”*

I believe that recent advances achieved under certain international treaties point the way. I am thinking, in particular, of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. I am also thinking of the mechanisms for ecological service payments.

Ancestral techniques for the use and processing of natural resources are being rediscovered in the “developed” world as well. But we must proceed

with caution. It is not merely a question of borrowing techniques or of trying to assign values to things that should not be viewed in financial terms: to be clear, to the same extent that I think it important to quantify and value the services provided by ecosystems, I find the notion of assigning a value to the living beings intolerable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a few weeks, we will meet again in Rio de Janeiro, 20 years after the Earth Summit. At the Summit, the GEF will present a new book on our organization's history, highlighting our contributions toward a green economy that values diversity. Several of these good practices were developed by working in the field with indigenous groups and traditional organizations, for example, our initiatives in the Congo basin, in Brazil, and in the Philippines. While we are proud of these accomplishments, the true significance of this book lies in the record of practical experience that it documents, experience that will help us immensely in our future projects.

Our mission at Rio is not to look back but to discuss how to create a green economy over the next 20 years. Some of us have high hopes for that meeting, while others doubt the ability of these large events to change



things. To the ‘Rio skeptics,’ I would point out that the GEF is one of the truly lasting and concrete results of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. We must be level-headed but we must not give in to pessimism or give up on our ambitious goals. Success depends on putting forward a pragmatic vision.

As researchers in the field of ethnobiology, you have a role to play in these discussions: you should share your findings with a much broader audience. This is why I congratulate you on the organization of this congress, which breaks the usual rules, bringing together more than just scientists, and I salute here the presence of UNESCO, but also partners from the field, as well as the representatives of indigenous peoples who are the first concerned. Finally, the commitment of the City of Montpellier and of the Region of Languedoc-Roussillon reminds us of the essential role of politics, both in these discussions and in decision-making.

All the ingredients of success are all together; it is up to us to find the right matters of degree.

Thank you