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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

Opening Remarks

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Global Environment Facility

Civil Society Organizations
42nd GEF Council Consultations Meeting
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Dear representatives of civil society organizations

Dear Council members, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

I bid you a warm welcome to the 42nd GEF Council Consultations meeting with civil society organizations. We have a very important agenda ahead of us, including some topics of special interest to civil society organizations that include indigenous peoples.

We at the Global Environment Facility believe strongly that effective involvement of civil society at all levels of endeavor, from local to national to global, is a key in achieving our mission and objectives of the projects we fund.

As you know, this will be my last Council meeting as CEO of the GEF, and I can say that during my years as head of this organization, I have seen a true evolution in the partnership between the GEF and civil society organizations. We have come a long way from the traditional relationship, in which CSOs looked to the GEF only as a funding source. Instead, we now work together in a strategic alliance, based upon collaboration, working toward the common goal of preserving the global environment.

A new pattern has emerged in which the GEF and CSOs engage in fruitful dialogue at the various conferences of the parties of the conventions and other international fora. CSOs have a pivotal role to play in advocating within their respective national and regional governments on behalf of determined action to protect and enhance the environment. And the grass-roots experience they have gained in actually implementing these programs has proven extremely beneficial in guiding negotiations over future programs.

In connection with our programming at the GEF, CSOs have available a variety of avenues in which to participate.

Reforms being implemented now under GEF-5 seek to increase country ownership, an effort that gives civil society organizations an important role to play. They help set priorities for GEF resources in the recipient countries through their participation in the National Portfolio Formulation Exercises. They exchange valuable information at the Extended Constituency Workshops, where one representative of CSOs per country is sponsored by the GEF to participate.

Through the Pilot Project on Broadening the GEF Partnership approved by Council, NGOs are given the opportunity to be accredited as the GEF Project Agencies to fulfill most of the roles of the current 10 GEF Agencies. I'm glad to report to you today that the Secretariat has received 16 applications of which four came from NGOs. Based on the assessment done by the GEF's Value Added

Review Committee, we are recommending that all four of these NGOs proceed to Stage II of the accreditation process.

Negotiations leading up to the GEF-5 Replenishment emphasized the positive and influential role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in GEF programs. Accordingly, the GEF Council approved a strategy for enhancing CSO engagement, and the Secretariat has taken significant steps in implementing the strategy and extending outreach to CSOs at local and regional levels. During the current reporting period the Secretariat has organized 13 Extended Constituency Workshops that generated 297 applications from CSOs to attend. Under the selection criteria and rules of participation, 170 CSO representatives were financially approved to attend these meetings.

The GEF has also fostered increased interaction between CSOs and our Operational Focal Points (OFPs). This makes the project identification and monitoring process more transparent and inclusive. As a result of this effort, OFPs are required to convene at least one annual meeting with members of the GEF Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Network in their country, which includes civil society organizations. The Secretariat works to ensure that these meetings are an integral part of the GEF-funded country support programs.

At a policy level, the Secretariat engages actively with civil society organizations, particularly in connection with Council Consultations. For example, in the past year alone the Secretariat has received more than 200 applications from CSOs to attend Council Consultations, with 60 earning financial support to underwrite their attendance. In addition, with the GEF NGO Network we successfully organized one regional consultation meeting for which 35 participants received GEF financial support to attend.

I don't need to persuade this group of the importance of financial support for CSOs. You understand the issue very well. And so I'm proud to inform you that we have provided already more than US\$ 230 million for the GEF Small Grants Program, which continues to significantly support CSOs and local and regional communities by providing financing for innovative projects.

By the way, in March of 1992 in the infancy of the GEF, among the first projects we approved was a GEF Small Grants Programme now celebrating its 20th anniversary.

On this occasion I would like to thank and congratulate the global manager, Dr. Delfin Ganapin, who is here among us today, along with and his team – the Central Programme Management Team in New York. This is a cooperative and collaborative effort involving the National Coordinators, Programme Assistants,

volunteers, members of National Steering Committees in all the country programs, and above all NGO and CBO grantee partners. Your dedication, commitment, and hard work help make in supporting our investments in the global environment succeed in and securing benefits for future generations.

At this, my last GEF Council meeting as CEO, I hope that we can bring to fruition a process we began more than a year ago, to provide a solid initial framework to enhance the participation of indigenous peoples in the GEF partnership. Switzerland generously supported a consultative process involving the Indigenous Peoples Task Force; it included various meetings with NGOs and representatives of indigenous peoples. As a result of this work, the Secretariat is presenting the Council with an information paper outlining Principles and Guidelines for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. This paper describes to the Council how the GEF Secretariat will bring into everyday practice our determination to include indigenous peoples in the programs we support. The paper lays out how the GEF will implement and put into practice the indigenous peoples sections of existing policies on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards and on Public Involvement in GEF Projects. We are sending a strong message to the agencies we work with that indigenous peoples represent a long-term commitment of the GEF.

The GEF NGO Network has played an important role in these processes and reforms, but it also has a big challenge ahead.

I invite you to revitalize the GEF NGO Network by broadening the membership base so it becomes more inclusive of other community based organizations. Take advantage of the success of the GEF Small Grants Programme and involve these organizations in the implementation of these projects so that those experiences can be leveraged and replicated across the civil society community.

I also invite you to continue advocating for the health and wellbeing of the global environment. Together, our actions will leave a better legacy for our children.

In closing, I would like to express to all of you my gratitude for your support and your contributions to the GEF during my tenure. Your contributions during replenishment rounds and, most recently, your support for opening GEF access for accreditation of new agencies will have a lasting and positive impact on our organization and on the global environment.

I sincerely hope that our paths cross somewhere in the future, and I wish you all the best.

Thank you.