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Global Tiger Initiative Event

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Global Environment Facility**

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Many of you know me from my career in international sustainable development finance. But let me tell you a little secret: I really love tigers! More importantly, I have grown to appreciate what their fate represents to us all. These magnificent creatures reflect the very essence of nature – and its fragility as well. Every time a tiger habitat disappears, it is not just the tiger that is lost. We lose too: ecosystems provide vital services to humans for their own survival. In short, if we allow tigers to go extinct, then our own future as a species hangs in the balance as well.

We are here today committed to change this path. The GEF has been a pioneer partner with the World Bank and others in the Global Tiger Initiative, and we are here today to follow the leadership of the countries in this journey. But we also want something different. Close to \$100 million dollars in GEF grants have already been awarded to tiger range countries for projects intended to protect tiger habitat. Of that total \$63 million have already been implemented by the World Bank and \$37 million by the United Nations Development Program. These investments were for the most part successful in protecting key habitats. But the fact remains that tiger populations continue to decline. I agree that money is badly needed, but we also need to learn to do things better in favor of the tiger, their habitat and the local people who are needed to make this happen.

This initiative is almost surely the last opportunity for the species. Yet I am hopeful. Why? It is because this is no longer another isolated initiative. It warms me to feel the excitement here in Nagoya with so many countries that are vital to the future of the tiger working together with civil society, funding agencies, research institutions and scientists. Surely, together we can and will succeed.

We at the GEF we have tried to do our part; during the last 12 months we approved the fast start financing of the Global Tiger Initiative through the World Bank. This has yielded results: together we are tackling illegal trading, and working with tiger range countries to develop a strategy that demonstrates that we can save this noble species at a very reasonable cost. We have also channeled resources to support the Global Tiger Summit which Russia will host next month; this will represent a landmark opportunity to bring countries and stakeholders together to take important steps forward so that we can tell our children that tigers in the wild will not disappear forever.

It is groundbreaking that an institution like the World Bank is leading this renewed call to save the tiger, an unusual undertaking for a development institution. But I could not have expected less from the leadership that Bob Zoellick has shown in making biodiversity conservation a mandate here. Coming from the World Bank, this statement takes a very special meaning because biodiversity and species conservation are now seen as integral components of sustainable development. This is why the tiger initiative is not the only partnership we have with the World Bank in biodiversity. Here in Nagoya we also launched with the World Bank, IUCN and responsible corporations, such as Nokia, a major initiative with the private sector – the Save our Species program, designed to mainstream biodiversity conservation into the DNA of companies in Japan and all over the world. We have also joined forces with the several countries, dozens of NGOs and the World Bank to support the identification and rapid action to protect the last remaining sites for the most threatened species in the world – the sites of the Alliance for Zero Extinction.

We did not succeed in meeting the 2010 biodiversity target. We can't afford to fail again by 2020. These new programs are designed to give an early start to highest priority interventions for biodiversity globally. It's time to move from words to action, and we will be there with you in full force.