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Opening Remarks

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

**CSO Meeting
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Anniversaries are usually a time to celebrate. And in 2011 we are celebrating two decades --- a whole generation---- of investing in people and the planet.

It's an important milestone that must be shared with you. I say this because I believe GEF could not have enjoyed the success it has today without the support of civil society. It is your voice that drives the kind of meaningful community based green investments we are known and respected for.

So with this in mind I decided to cancel the traditional opening reception we typically hold the first night of Council and instead hold a more inclusive event to show that the GEF is about people, not just projects.

Anniversaries are a time of reflection, to take note of what has worked and not worked over time so we can adapt and learn for the future.

Protecting the global environment is an ongoing challenge in which financing can but is not always a guarantee for positive change. Yet the GEF, as a financial mechanism for key international conventions, has over its 20 year history met this

challenge time and again by being a learning institution---constantly evolving to meet the needs of the countries it serves.

One critical reason we have been so successful leveraging our resources has been our direct engagement with civil society organizations, many of whom are with us today. Don't forget the GEF was one of the first international financial institutions to reach out to groups such as you, seeking the on the ground experience to help make projects and policies more effective faster for the people who need help the most.

It was in this spirit of inclusiveness that the GEF Council in 1995 decided that civil society should have a way to hold consultations with them and other stakeholders ahead of the meetings to enhance understanding of GEF policy issues and provide a forum for CSOs to debate directly. We have and continue to believe this is a critical part of the process to enhance CSO understanding of what we do and what we hope to accomplish with their help.

But like with anything, not all is working well and there's plenty of room to improve on the structure and functioning of the CSO Network. We continue to

receive expressions of frustration by some who do not agree with the selection process of regional focal points – a recurrent theme across all regions. Dissatisfaction is also brought to my attention with the manner in which the participation at CSO consultations in Washington, DC is handled.

However, let me be clear that these are issues that I can only bring to your attention; I cannot solve them for you. Here it is the job of the network itself to exercise its independence when it comes to decisions over process and representation. At the same time when the legitimacy of the network is called into question, we need to face these problems head on. Otherwise we risk the credibility of the whole GEF. I am sure that you all share with me the aspiration for a stronger network that is transparent, representative and legitimate in the eyes of our partners and stakeholders. Let's try to work on these improvements starting now.

One significant improvement I can share with you now relates to how indigenous peoples issues are taken up in the GEF network and in GEF projects. Attending to this legitimate need, I have committed to engage with this stakeholder sector, and support it to the extent possible, as it undergoes its consultation processes. The views collected through their consultations will help to inform the work that the

GEF Secretariat will be leading with the development of a GEF-specific indigenous policy, that will hopefully be brought to Council in its Spring meeting of 2012. Most importantly, we would recommend that the consultations concentrate on how the voice of indigenous peoples can be best heard during the development phase of GEF-funded projects. I see several new faces here today from the indigenous peoples. Many have traveled from New York, where they are attending a session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, to help jump start these consultations. I am happy to have been able to support their participation yesterday and today, and I warmly welcome their full participation in our anniversary celebration tonight – at a venue that is emblematic of our commitment – the National Museum of the American Indian. Indigenous peoples have become an integral part of the GEF family and I wish you take on an even larger role in the future.

Indeed our future together is brighter than ever now that our reform agenda is moving forward in our new funding cycle. As you know one of the key reforms that you had been fighting for over the last couple of years was to broaden access to GEF resources by organizations beyond the UN agencies and MDBs. I am confident that this council will in fact heed this call and approve a new route that

will enable CSO organizations that can abide to independently audited fiduciary standards – to access resources directly without an intervening agency. This will be truly revolutionary and can open up incredible opportunities for us to work much closer together. And it is happening because of your voice.

SO what do we do now? Moving forward, we remain committed to further enhancing our engagement with CSOs in order to improve the effectiveness, transparency, accountability and efficiency of the GEF network as a whole.

An important step ahead for all CSOs who want to access resources is to go through an accreditation process to meet the GEF's fiduciary standards and other qualifications established by our Council. Along with rigorous fiduciary requirements there are environmental and social safeguards.

I know that some of you have expressed concern about the GEF using the World Bank's safeguards as a starting point. Yet as far as I am aware, there is no other multilateral with a comparable and consistent set of standards, imperfect though they may be, for us to work with. In any case, even if we somehow are able to establish "ideal" safeguards, then we may not have any agencies to implement GEF-financed projects. The main intent of the safeguards is to ensure that no

environmental and/or social harm is done during the execution of activities intended to generate global environmental benefits.

CSOs are also at the table helping shape the future of the GEF. Moving forward, we want to strengthen our ties with these organizations — you are on the ground and see first-hand what works and what doesn't work. YOU are frequently the people responsible for crucial deliverables of GEF-funded projects. And we need YOUR independent voice to ensure the recent reforms we put in place stay robust and current. We remain committed to further enhancing our engagement with CSOs and indigenous people's organizations in order to improve the effectiveness, transparency, accountability and efficiency of the GEF network as a whole.

A roadmap of sorts to help you through that process is an updated publication called "A to Z Guide to the GEF" which is intended to help CSOs and other partners understand how to work with the reformed GEF.

I look forward to a robust debate today so let me stop now and take your questions.