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Keynote Speech

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Good Afternoon,

My name is Monique Barbut. For the past 5 years, I have had the privilege of leading the Global Environment Facility, the largest financial mechanism protecting the global environmental goods. GEF works in support of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

So far, GEF alone has invested \$10 billion, with \$40 billion mobilized in co-financing. Through this investment, 2,600 projects in more than 165 countries have been implemented, aimed at the management, care, and restoration of our planet.

The GEF also provides funding for international waters and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Furthermore, the GEF operates two funds on behalf of the UNFCCC – the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) and the Least Development Country Fund (LDCF) – that together have provided \$ 420 million in grants to support developing countries in efforts to reduce vulnerability to climate change in the context of their national development.

The GEF has become the secretariat to the Adaptation Fund, and more recently established a new fund – the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (NPIF) to pilot the implementation of the Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) arising from the utilization of genetic resources.

The GEF has recently inaugurated an ambitious \$1 billion funding program exploring the mutually reinforcing links between global benefits provided by forests to climate change mitigation, biodiversity and sustainable land management.

These investments can now be felt everywhere, and are laying the seeds for green economies to flourish throughout the developing world.

This conference has an ‘eye on the Earth,’ but also wants to catch a glimpse of Rio+20 just around the corner. It is worth reflecting on our priorities. The community of nations came to Rio back in 1992 with the conviction that the environment was inextricably linked to development, and that urgent action was needed at the planetary scale to address the widespread loss of biodiversity, the rising threats posed by human-induced climate change, and increased insecurity faced by hundreds of millions of people due to land degradation and desertification.

The three Rio Conventions irrevocably introduced the development agenda to its third pillar, bringing it together with the social and economic agendas

under the banner of sustainable development. It is my conviction that only through this convergence will the so-called Green Economy emerge from an being an abstract concept to become a real manifestation of actions at the national and local levels.

While much has been achieved, the original framework from the 1992 UNCED became progressively fragmented by virtue of the separate routes taken by the Rio accords. 20 years later, we have come to realize that biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable land management are integral parts of the same puzzle. Experience has shown that while some progress can be made via thematically-based international accords, the multi-faceted nature of the threats to planet's life support systems requires more concerted and integrated efforts. In my view, Rio+20 should take this premise as a central tenet of its deliberations.

Global environmental responsibilities are now spread across too many institutions, with diluted, overlapping or even conflicting mandates. This proliferation has placed an increasing burden on countries to meet their individual obligations and responsibilities.

The international financial landscape now consists of a plethora of funds that were established with laudable objectives -- but that now limp along with insufficient funding. Each of these funds has its own rules, befuddling low-

capacity countries already struggling to assemble viable financial assistance packages. The multiplication of funds ultimately penalizes the developing countries by straining their capacities to capture international funding, in addition to stimulating the emergence of perpetually anemic funding mechanisms. We need to work in the opposite direction. The international community therefore must deal with the chaos and under-resourcing of the global environment finance system.

I am convinced that the seeds of green economies are hidden in plain sight. They are everywhere you look. What they lack is the connective tissue that will grow the individual seeds into a fully fledged forest. The accumulated portfolio built by the GEF and its partners over the past 20 years contains many of these seeds.

For example, ecological infrastructures – a term coined by the TEEB study - were made secure by the GEF across 734 million hectares of new and improved land and oceans dedicated to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biological resources. We were able to foster the catalytic transfer to developing countries of 30 climate-friendly technologies for energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable urban transport, and methane reduction, among other benefits. In this process, projects have mobilized additional investments, created jobs and enabling environments,

pioneered innovative financial instruments, and promoted market-based mechanisms. The result has been the widespread adoption and dissemination of climate-friendly technologies.

The fruits of these experiences need to be broadcast and scaled up, along with the dissemination of supporting political, institutional and investment environments to initiate the shift towards green economies.

This groundbreaking conference here in Abu Dhabi is also looking at the role of environmental information and data management tools to support decision-making processes. We believe that information systems are vital for the adequate management of natural resources. They have a very special role in helping to bridge the technological and educational gap between the developed and the developing world.

These tools are not an end in themselves, but powerful enablers of new development pathways. I regret to say that many of the policy and legislative frameworks that GEF has funded have ended up on office shelves because the project designs in many cases lacked implementation, monitoring and enforcement tools. Here is where environmental information and computer applications can have transformative power because they empower different branches of government, together with civil society, to track and assess the provisions introduced in policy and legislative provisions.

Accordingly, the GEF has become a major provider of resources that allowed Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote-sensing technologies to be applied in the developing world to support sustainable natural resource practices.

On average, about 10% of the of budgets of most projects we support - amounting to approximately \$500 million to date - is used to secure hardware, GIS, and remote sensing software, together with much needed training. We are proud of our accomplishments in fostering south-south collaboration to build capacity on the use of these tools. For example, we supported dozens of technicians from the six countries of the Congo Basin to be trained in Brazil on lower-cost and more aptly customized remote-sensing and monitoring systems for tropical forests. These systems are essential for identifying deforestation, illegal logging and for the deployment of enforcement responses. The Congo Basin and the Amazon are the repositories of the largest expanses of tropical forest in the world. Endogenous technologies developed in Brazil are now proving much more appropriate for the situation of the Congo than more expensive systems available in the market. In addition, they help to generate higher-end jobs in the beneficiary countries. Drawing on this experience, we plan to expand these programs to other forest countries.

Our climate change adaptation projects also make frequent use of these tools. In flood-prone countries of South East Europe, we financed a catastrophe- and weather-risk re-insurance facility, and increased public awareness of weather risk. GIS is being used to conduct risk and vulnerability assessments, including creating actuarial maps that incorporate weather-related risks. When disaster strikes, damage can be assessed quickly with the help of satellite imagery. This will reduce the economic vulnerability of homeowners, the enterprise sector and government agencies to the adverse impact of climate change.

In Tanzania, we supported the climate-proofing of coastal infrastructure. In doing so, GIS and Remote Sensing imagery become essential baseline data of existing infrastructure and valuable mangrove habitats. The data helps in considering how best to target assets to protect communities and assets from the effects climate change.

I am also excited about a large batch of projects and programs approved last month. With \$516.40 million of approved grants, an impressive amount of \$4.5 billion from a variety of co-financiers will support 40 stand-alone projects and 9 programmatic approaches, benefiting 99 countries. This collective investment is not only remarkable for its size, but also for the key innovations around which it has been designed. I was very happy to see our

investments at work protecting the oceans and the fisheries, resources that support the lives and livelihoods of countless communities.

Last but not the least, we approved a major new program focusing on the deserts of the Middle East and North Africa that will help to maintain and improve the flow of desert ecosystem services for sustainable development. The resulting positive feedback loop will ultimately enhance desert livelihood opportunities and increase the resilience and adaptation responses of desert communities and ecosystems to projected pressures, in particular climate change. Information management, remote sensing and GIS applications are at the core of these new initiatives – from oceans to deserts - providing the means to track, monitor and assess the management of natural resources in a cost-effective way.

In conclusion let me say that the GEF has demonstrated extraordinary flexibility in taking on board new challenges and funding modalities, while preserving the coherence of a unified financial mechanism. I am very happy with the results of the past 20 years and I am sure the next two decades will witness an even greater role for the GEF.

Thank you.