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**GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY**  
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

## **Opening Remarks**

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

**Global Environment Facility Book Launch**

***From Rio to Rio: A 20-Year Journey to Green the World's Economies***

**Wednesday, June 20, 2012, 1300-1430**

**Rio Centro T-6**

Welcome, everyone, to Rio Centro and to the launch of a publication in which we take great pride – the story of the Global Environment Facility. My name is Monique Barbut, I am the CEO of the GEF, and I want to thank you for attending today's book launch.

I am joined today by a distinguished panel whom I will introduce in a few minutes. We will hear from them in what I hope to be an energetic discussion of how far we have come over the two decades since the first Earth Summit, and where we are headed over the next twenty years.

Before we begin I would like to speak with you for just a few brief minutes about the organization I have led for the past six years, an organization I am sad to be leaving at the end of next month, and an organization that I feel strongly can continue to be a leader in our quest to join together our environmental and economic agendas.

The community of nations went to Rio in 1992 with the conviction that the environment was inextricably linked to development. 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 GEF was barely a year old at that time, and existed in those early days primarily as an experiment, funding pilot projects with the hope of generating results significant enough to justify operations on a larger scale.

It was the 1992 Earth Summit that really set the GEF in motion by naming the GEF as the financial mechanism for the Rio environmental conventions dealing with biodiversity, climate change and desertification. Our early success supporting these three globally-agreed environmental priorities was what persuaded our member countries to support GEF participation in a wider array of environmental endeavors.

Today, the GEF has grown to become the largest funder of projects to improve the global environment. We have invested more than US\$ 10 billion in our first 21 years, and leverage those funds with more than \$47 billion in co-financing toward 2,800 projects and over 10,000 small grants in 168 developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

But this is about much more than money. The work we do with our 10 implementing agencies has generated a substantial wealth of knowledge that we

are now applying to a new round of investments. What we have learned is helping us break new ground in supporting projects that address multi-focal areas. From the very beginning, we have understood the linkages between the global environment and the global economy. What we have come to realize over time is that environmental challenges long viewed as separate issues are also linked. A single program we support on forests, for example, may have aspects relevant to land degradation, climate change, biodiversity and access to water. We also understand much better today the importance of local and regional voices in developing projects and programs to better the global environment. That's why we have worked to build into our programs provisions that ensure a voice for indigenous peoples, women, local authorities, civil society organizations and other groups that are all too often left out of the international agenda.

The book is called *From Rio to Rio: A 20-Year Journey to Green The World's Economies*. I hope you give yourself a chance to spend some time with this book. In honor of our twentieth birthday, we decided to tell twenty stories through the lens of twenty projects. Needless to say, these represent a small fraction of the work the GEF does around the world. But I think they will give you a good idea of the kind of positive impact we can help create, working with our partners. Perhaps I could briefly touch upon three.

While most of our work takes place in Africa, Asia and Latin America, one of our first projects took the GEF to Eastern Europe and the Danube River Basin. This is an area that includes territory of 19 countries, making it the world's most international river basin, home to some 81 million people, some of whom were at war with one another in the Balkans when this project got under way. The GEF worked with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme to help Danube region countries develop an agreement for the protection and improvement of these waters. Once the framework was in place, the way was clear to work at regional and local levels, down the level of individual farmers and industries in the river basin. Farmers were encouraged to change practices to reduce the nutrient pollution that was choking off life in the river. Today we can point to the Danube Basin project as a major success story. A vast region of the western Black Sea that had become a hypoxic dead zone has come back to life.

We are called the *Global* Environment Facility, but this does not mean that we don't understand the importance of *local* action to bring about significant positive impacts. This is the idea underlying the Small Grants Programme and the Least Developed Countries Fund, or LDCF for short. In a chapter called "Averting a Himalayan Tsunami," you will read about an extraordinary LDCF project under

way high in the Himalayas of Bhutan. There we are financing a project that is helping local peoples avoid the threat of catastrophic glacial floods. They are doing this literally one stone at a time at the highest work site on the planet. The Least Developed Countries Fund was established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and is managed by the GEF. If you want to get a clear picture of what is meant by adaptation to climate change, go to Bhutan and watch as local peoples stack stones to build channels that help control the flow of glacial melt-water and prevent a situation where a glacial lake could burst and cascade down upon villages downstream. Villagers earn about US\$ 10 per day to work in these tough conditions, five times the average national wage. And so instead of paying out huge sums of money to clean up after a disaster that could trace its origins to global warming, we are helping to prevent that disaster from ever happening in the first place.

I could not let this occasion pass without talking about the Amazon Region Protected Areas project, one that I know is close to the hearts of many of you here. Here in Brazil, the GEF is supporting establishment of the world's largest rainforest conservation initiative, a joint project with the World Bank. Collectively, these forests cover an area larger than Texas or the Ukraine, store more than 4.6 billion tons of carbon, or about 18 percent of the Amazon's total carbon stock, and are

home to countless thousands species of plants and animals. Since its inception, ARPA has accounted for 37 percent of the decrease in deforestation in the country, and for nearly half of all protected areas created in the world. The GEF is supporting ARPA with grants in two phases totaling \$46 million, ARPA is a long-term initiative launched in partnership with the Government of Brazil, the Brazilian Biodiversity Fund (Funbio), the World Bank, GEF, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the German Development Bank (KfW). I am pleased to tell you that earlier this month the U.S. Department of Treasury honored the ARPA program for its role in helping to protect biodiversity, building knowledge about the Amazon, and fostering respect for the rights of local people. You can learn more about this extraordinary project in our *Rio to Rio* book.

As proud of we are of the improvements in the global environment that we support in the field, we are equally proud of another aspect of our work that, perhaps, does not provide a subject for some of the beautiful photography you see in this volume. I am talking about the improvements in our business practices that have helped build confidence in the GEF among our donor nations and the partners who provide vital co-financing for GEF projects. Through extensive collaboration with our member nations, we have streamlined and shortened of the project cycle and approval timeline. We have kept the secretariat staff lean. And we have

improved our business standards to reflect the pace at which the world is moving. In no small part because of these investments in efficient and effective operations, the GEF Council earlier this month approved the most ambitious and exceptional work program the Council has yet seen during my tenure and that of the life of the GEF. The US\$ 607 million Work Program leverages 7.25 dollars for every 1 dollar of GEF grant.

One explanation for this strong vote of confidence comes from the work of our fully independent GEF Evaluation Office. And while we are talking about books, I want to let you all know that GEF Evaluation is publishing a book of its own here at Rio. It is called *The Journey to Rio+20: Gathering Evidence on Expectations for the GEF*. The book is a serious study, but also somewhat more lighthearted in its approach compared to the usual super-sober work of the Evaluation Office. It examines a question that is admittedly subjective: How have the GEF's achievements over the past 20 years compared to the expectations for the GEF voiced at the time of the Rio-92 conference? I would say that, in keeping with tradition, the Evaluation Office has not given us an entirely perfect score. But I think that my Evaluation Office colleagues see it much the way I do: I think we bet right 20 years ago when we created the GEF, enshrining it within an Instrument and providing it with a well-balanced governance structure and a strong network of



agencies. The proof of the reliability of the GEF structure is in the fact that new funds created over the last several years, some as a reaction to the GEF, have all ended up looking remarkably similar to the GEF.

The two publications, I think, will give you a very good feel for how the GEF goes about the task of protecting and improving the global environment and doing so effectively at a time when government budgets are under extraordinary pressure. The book we are here to talk about today *From Rio to Rio*, provides a succinct, readable, and engaging narrative and analysis of the 20-year history of GEF projects. I believe this book will have lasting value for anyone interested in issues concerning the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, or about the institutional framework for sustainable development. We think that both specialists and non-experts can get something out of this book, with its compelling and pertinent stories drawn from experience in the field that demonstrate the GEF's accomplishments, evolution, and future challenges. Each chapter is a story in its own right and can be read and appreciated separately. Taken together, these chapters form a larger narrative and present the broader lessons of the GEF's experience.

All of you are eager, as I am, to hear from our panelists. So let me introduce them.

First I want to especially thank the representative from our host country, Ms. Izabella Teixeira, Brazil's Environment Minister. Izabella, you were so kind to author a foreword to our book, and I cannot say enough about the constructive partnership Brazil and the GEF have formed. Under your leadership, Brazil has seen the least amount of deforestation since annual forest monitoring began in 1988. And you have been one of the driving forces behind the success of the ARPA project. And I should add that ARPA has not only been a success in Brazil, it has also become a model for forest protection around the world.

We are honored to be joined today by Edward Norton, who is here not as a star of stage and screen but as the Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity. Ed has been an active promoter of international efforts to reverse the ongoing trend of threatened species going extinct. He is committed to safeguarding the unique richness of biological diversity across the globe.

My friend and colleague Christiana Figueres is the leading international figure in the campaign to address climate change. As Executive Secretary of the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana has been making significant progress against the strongest of political headwinds. She understands that this threat to our global environment cannot be ignored while the world waits for a consensus to form. And so I have been proud to work side by side with her as we take the next key steps, most notably, the establishment of the Green Climate Fund.

Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, the former National Secretary of Forests and Biodiversity working with Minister Teixeira, has earned his reputation as one of the foremost experts on the Convention on Biodiversity. He is now its Executive Director, and Braulio we are delighted you are here.

My friend Luc Gnacadja was appointed Executive Secretary of the U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification in September 2007. For five years prior to that, Luc was Minister in charge of the Environment in Benin. In both positions, he has shown that he was an architect by training and by heart. He is the architect of the 10-year strategy of the UNCCD and its implementation. And during his mandate as Minister, he deeply reformed the Ministry of Environment and

equipped it with a Strategy, a National Action Program, and various management tools to transform it into a performing institution appreciated by all partners. We have worked closely together on a number of issues.

Last but by no means least, we are honored to be joined by Ms. Rachel Kyte, the World Bank's Vice President of Sustainable Development. Rachel is in overall charge of the Bank's global work in agriculture, the environment, infrastructure, urban development, and social development, a formidable portfolio indeed.

Today's discussion will be a unique opportunity to demonstrate practical solutions to global environmental issues that the GEF has addressed over the last two decades while highlighting a key theme of Rio+20 – the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions to sustainable development.

So let's start the panel discussion and perhaps Ed Norton would like to start us off.

[Panel discussion]

[Conclusion]

This has been a stimulating exchange and I want to thank all of our panelists for honoring the GEF by joining us today. I hope all of you who have joined us will leave feeling that the discussion has helped you better understand what is at stake in the Rio+20 summit as we look back on the legacy of the first great environmental gathering in Rio.

As I mentioned, my second term as CEO of the GEF ends at the end of July, so this is something of a farewell. But we at the GEF understand better than most that the world is a small place. And as I fully intend to remain engaged in global environmental issues and sustainable development, I feel sure we will meet again soon.

Thank you for coming.