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Global Environment Facility

Joint UNEP-GEF Press Event Highlighting African Geothermal

Opening Statement

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Thank you for being here today to take part of this media training session here in Poznan.

My name is Monique Barbut and I am the CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility. Part of our role as an international institution is to be the financial mechanism of this convention; we also have a long history investing in local sustainable development for global environmental benefits.

I encourage you to look at our website to get more information on the work we do. But to keep it simple here since we don't have a lot of time I can say that our mission is to invest in projects that can make a local economic impact AND deliver global environmental benefits.

The projects we finance address many challenges –endangered species, food insecurity, polluted water and air, and they do this for some of the world's most vulnerable: The ones on the front lines of climate change who are already suffering the most.

There's a saying that there's no such thing as a free lunch. Maybe that's true but today I hope you will feel like you are getting something that is even better than a free lunch ---a good story that readers will want to know more about: I am talking about a clean energy source being used right now in Africa –geothermal to be specific and it's a nice change of pace from all the doom and gloom stories you are hearing here.

It's a story of hope.

In the East African Rift Valley several countries that can access heat from the earth—otherwise known as geothermal energy—are already tapping into this potential to power local electricity grids.

This is story that has frankly been underreported. There's a lot going for this project, which the GEF and UNEP have been involved in for several years: the energy generated

does not come from an oil tanker but locally; it has the potential to be as cheap as polluting fossil fuels; it also is a lot cleaner than oil or gas and is renewable.

The number of countries worldwide producing power from geothermal resources could increase 120 percent in a decade, according to the Geothermal Energy Association, from 21 in 2000 to as many as 46 in 2010. But not all countries with geothermal potential can afford to turn the resource into power.

This is where the GEF comes in. The Rift Valley is an area that has huge potential that could impact 12 countries: it runs from the Red Sea to Mozambique.

Two years ago we approved a $17.7 million grant for a Joint Geophysical Imaging Project which includes Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda, Tanzania and Eritrea. That money provided both technical assistance and funds that will help encourage geothermal field development.

One of the new wells that was drilled using this GEF-funded technique hit up to four times more steam, allowing for a 7,000 MW potential in Africa in less than 10 years, along with expansion of the geothermal up the Rift Valley

This has obvious global and local environmental benefits: indigenous electricity, zero emissions, energy security, lower oil imports and less global greenhouse emissions which is why we are all here!

In fact the geothermal potential of the rift valley in Kenya alone is estimated at over 4,000 MW, whereas actual peak demand in Kenya currently stands at 1,000 MW. This means the promise of energy security which could also mean economic and environmental security if we can expand this more.

Another project to expand geothermal utilization to neighboring countries (ARGeo – African Rift Geothermal project) is currently being prepared by UNEP in collaboration

with the World Bank. Already field surveys have been carried out in Zambia, Djibouti and Rwanda. Other countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda which are in the initial phase of geothermal power development, could also tap into this rich energy resource found in the great East African Rift.

The bottom line here is that overcoming the economic and technical hurdles to renewable energy generation is part of our shared responsibility. The work in the Rift Valley is demonstrating that geothermal is not only technologically viable but cost effective for countries in Africa where there an overall potential of at least 7,000MW – that is a huge amount.

Infact geothermal world-wide is undergoing a renaissance with the numbers of countries starting to use this power source estimated to rise from around 20 in 2000 to close to 50 by 2010. Africa's Rift Valley will I hope become a beacon for further geothermal acceleration in terms of size and the number of power plants alongside its geographical spread across the developed and developing world.