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Global Environment Facility

Subregional Workshop for Middle Eastern and North African GEF Focal Points

**Remarks by Mrs. Monique Barbut
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Global Environment Facility**

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, I wish to thank the government of the Kingdom of Morocco for its hospitality and warm welcome.

I am especially happy to meet once again, here, with all the GEF focal points for the Middle East and North Africa as well as the key partners that are helping us support the countries of this important region in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have just arrived from Algiers, where I spent the last two days with all the African Ministers responsible for the environment. The purpose of their meeting was to harmonize their strategies in the context of the international negotiations on climate – I must admit that I feel truly satisfied about the determination expressed by those political authorities, and in particular the ones from the MENA region.

I took that opportunity to draw their attention to a poorly understood challenge that the GEF deems to be one of the most important issues facing the planet. These days, we hear talk only about the international financial crisis. Everyone is worried about a global economic recession. I stressed to the African Ministers and to our partners who were there that we are just as threatened, and perhaps more so, by the risk of growing poverty, if we do not work together to strengthen the catalytic role that the sustainable development approach must continue to play in the construction of the global economy, including that of the most vulnerable countries.

I said to them—for they were meeting to harmonize their approach with respect to the post-Kyoto negotiations on climate—that a prosperous future cannot be built without responsible

consideration of the issues related to the sustainable management of environmental resources. With the help of the climate change agenda, it is up to us to seize the opportunities afforded at this time to convince others that the priorities need to be reordered, with greater emphasis placed on the financing of sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My presence here, only one week after our Council meeting of November 2008, attests to the interest that I have never ceased to demonstrate in the Mediterranean, this important region that is once again laying the groundwork for cooperation that promises to be exemplary.

Indeed, the Union for the Mediterranean, inaugurated in July 2008 and co-chaired by the Arab Republic of Egypt and the French Republic, is pursuing a sustainable development approach.

In this regard, I would like to thank and congratulate the Egyptian and French co-Chairs for their efforts and to assure them of the willingness of the GEF to cooperate with the Union for the Mediterranean. The implementation of projects related to sustainable development is a priority for the Ministers who signed the declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on July 13, 2008.

The GEF has invested much in this region. The GEF portfolio totals \$463 million, and those resources have attracted more than \$1.75 billion in co-financing. That package has facilitated the implementation of 122 projects and 764 micro-projects.

The largest increase in GEF financial contributions occurred in the current period, the fourth GEF reconstitution phase. I am pleased to inform you that we have more than quadrupled our investments, compared with the annual average of \$15.3 million throughout all the previous

phases. To give you an idea of what this means, our investment in the first two years of the fourth reconstitution phase (2006–08) amounts to \$131 million.

This substantial increase of our financing operations in the Mediterranean region supports me in the choices I have made since I arrived at the head of the GEF, in particular: the focus on strategic investments that lead to greater impacts, consolidation of the pragmatic approach, the shift away from isolated non-strategic projects, and the establishment of multi-faceted programs.

You will also see very clear proof of this approach in our current involvement in the region, as exemplified by:

- The strategic partnership for the great Mediterranean marine ecosystem (Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority, Albania, Montenegro, Turkey);
- The reduction of risks in the sustainable management of the Western Sahara Aquifer System (Algeria, Tunisia, Libya);
- The sustainable management of the East Nile (Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan);
- The integration of practices for the sustainable management of lands and water resources (Jordan); and
- The streamlining of the management of land and aquatic resources (Tunisia).

You will find, in the document entitled “The GEF Commitment in the Mediterranean Region,” which I am pleased to launch today with you, the history of the action taken by the GEF and its partners in the region, as well as details of the projects involved. This document is the result of

ceaseless work by the countries represented here today, in collaboration with the executing agencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would also like to propose that beyond these projects, we should explore together the possibility of making our cooperation more explicit and strategic, through the establishment of what could be a Council for environmental management in the Mediterranean.

I find such a council necessary, as it would create the conditions for improving the coordination of our actions, in harmony with the main principles guiding the program of the Union for the Mediterranean.

To that end, I would like to share with you a few examples of similar programs that the GEF has sponsored with the countries concerned and with executing agencies. The strategic partnerships for the reduction of pollution in the Danube/Black Sea Basin and for the sustainable development of the east Asian seas, in collaboration with the countries in question, with the GEF, with the executing agencies, and with the partners involved, have established committees to manage the sustainable environment of these ecosystems and have backed them with trust funds to support environmental protection. Structures of this type could possibly be transposed to the Mediterranean region, which does not at this stage have an equivalent.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have no doubt that this meeting will serve as an additional catalyst for enhancing subregional cooperation as regards managing and financing the environment in the Mediterranean. You have a heavy schedule, and I wish you fruitful working meetings. It is thus on this note that I wish to end my remarks and tell you once again how delighted I am to be among you, and I look forward to continuing our dialogue this evening at the reception.