

STATEMENT BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF

THE FIRST GLOBAL PRIVATE DONOR FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY

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ONE NATURE • ONE WORLD • OUR FUTURE
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Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had the immense privilege of visiting Berlin in December 2007 on the occasion of the adoption of the German Strategy on Biodiversity. When I returned to Montreal, I addressed the staff of the Secretariat and told them that those among us who would have the unique opportunity of attending and serving the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to our Convention would be part of history. I also stated that that meeting would open a new chapter in the history of the Convention on Biological Diversity: historians of the Convention would refer to the pre- and post-Bonn era as we refer to the pre- and post-Rio era regarding the sustainable-development agenda. And indeed the Bonn Biodiversity Summit was historical: it brought together 6,000 participants including Ministers and Heads of State as well as non-governmental organizations, youth, women, indigenous and local authorities, the private sector, the media, artists, as well as many others. A Global Nature Alliance was born in Bonn in May 2008.

I would like once again to pay tribute to the German people and Government for their vision and leadership. I also want to pay tribute to you, Jochen Flasbarth, for your unique contribution in making it happen. Today you are completing your mission by providing a missing link: that to the private citizen. I would like to applaud the establishment of the Global Private Donor Forum on Biodiversity and pay tribute to Kris and Douglas Tompkins for kindly accepting to join our forces.

It is fitting that this first world private donor forum on biodiversity should take place in Berlin, for Berlin has a rich philanthropic history. In 2006, the city honoured one of its great patrons, James Simon, with a portrait relief in recognition of his unprecedented donations to the city's museums, which almost single-handedly brought them into the first rank of museums worldwide. Overall, he is estimated to have donated between one quarter to one third of his personal net worth to charities. The same is true of fellow philanthropist and Berliner Eduard Arnhold.

What motivates such giving? The philosopher William James once said that the greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it. For many donors, human society is that more permanent something: their works and deeds reflect a desire to ensure the happiness and well-being of people around the globe both now and into the future.

It is therefore not surprising today's private donors often seek to fund efforts to address the most pressing humanitarian issues of our time. Familiar examples include Bill and Melinda Gates establishing a foundation to combat infectious diseases and support international development; George Soros financing efforts to create open societies by promoting democracy and human rights; Oprah Winfrey funding international education initiatives; Ted Turner donating US\$ 1 billion to the United Nations. The list goes on, with donors both large and small using their wealth to fight for the well-being of others.

Unfortunately, the state of the environment is not always given similar attention as a humanitarian issue. While donors have become increasingly concerned with environmental degradation, its ability to erode the stability of human society remains underappreciated. Biodiversity loss and climate change, in particular, are problems that, if left unaddressed, will exacerbate poverty and undermine efforts toward sustainability.

If all of us present here today are very much aware of the contribution of Gates, Soros and Turner, how many of us are aware of the contribution of Kris and Douglas Tompkins and other great philanthropists active in nature conservation? Not many, I'm afraid, and this is the symptom of a bigger problem. The "human crisis" referred to by Ms. Monique Barbut, the Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is not widely known. Ms. Barbut wrote an article published in the CBD Magazine *Gincana* entitled "An inconvenient truth: nobody cares about biodiversity". The unprecedented crisis of the loss of biodiversity is indeed unknown or ignored.

Biodiversity is our ultimate source of many irreplaceable goods and services, and yet it is being lost at an incredible rate. As a result of human activities, species are currently going extinct up to 1,000 times faster than the natural background rate, comparable only to past catastrophic mass extinction events. Without a reduction in this rate, we will lose as much biodiversity by 2050 as would be lost by asphaltting

a pristine, untouched area 1.5 times the size of the United States. The resulting impoverishment of human society will be tremendous, as we depend on biodiversity for food, medicine, building material, purification of air and water, replenishment of soil fertility, crop pollination, as well as much else.

To make matters worse, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss can contribute to climate change, whose well-known negative effects include rising sea levels, increases in disease outbreaks, and a greater frequency of extreme weather-events. For example, deforestation is currently estimated to be responsible for 20 per cent of annual human-induced CO₂ emissions, as forests account for as much as 80 per cent of the total above-ground terrestrial carbon. Further, peatlands, which cover only 3 per cent of the world's terrestrial surface, store 30 per cent of the carbon contained in both terrestrial vegetation and soils. Hence, as forest and peatland loss continues, a much greater proportion of global carbon ends up in the atmosphere and not in terrestrial biomass. Likewise, intensive agricultural practices that destroy ground cover and increase soil erosion decrease the retention time of carbon in the soil.

And yet, just as biodiversity loss contributes to climate change, climate change in turn contributes to biodiversity loss. In fact, it is emerging as one of the leading causes. Approximately 10 per cent of species assessed so far have an increasingly high risk of extinction for every 1°C rise in global mean surface temperature. This trend is expected to hold true up to at least a 5°C increase, which would result in about 50 per cent of species facing increased risks of extinction. Overall, as many as one million species may face increased threats of extinction as a result of climate change. Recently, observed changes in the climate have produced alterations in species distribution and population size, timing of reproduction or migration events, and an increased frequency of pest and disease outbreaks. Climate change has also been implicated in widespread coral bleaching, wetland salinization and salt-water intrusion, the expansion of arid and semi-arid lands at the expense of grasslands and acacia, poleward and upward shifts in habitats, replacement of tropical forests with savannah, and the shifting of desert dunes.

The vicious positive feedback cycle between biodiversity loss and climate change threatens the future of humanity as much as any other challenge we face. Many of the world's poorest people—the very same people whose standard of living generous donors are trying to improve—are directly dependent on biodiversity and ecosystem services for their everyday livelihood. For example, most of the estimated 30 million small-scale fishers in the developing world are dependent on coral reefs for their food and livelihood; yet 60 per cent of coral reefs worldwide could be lost by 2030 through fishing, damage, pollution, disease, invasive alien species and coral bleaching.

A particularly good example of the threat that biodiversity loss and climate change pose to developing countries comes from the Sahel grasslands of Africa. Millions of pastoralists live in this semi-arid, drought-prone region and depend on cattle herds and subsistence farming for survival. In recent decades, the Sahel's climate has become drier, resulting in repeated droughts and the spread of the desert. These changes have placed large stresses on some countries in this region and resulted in social and economic instability, which has occasionally fostered violent conflict.

On the positive side, given that biodiversity loss and climate change interact with each other, they can also be addressed synergistically. In Bara, a drought-prone province in western Sudan, cultivation of marginal lands, fuelwood gathering and overstocking of livestock have drastically depleted the vegetation. As a result, soil erosion, desertification and atmospheric dust have all intensified. However, beginning in 1992 and continuing through 2000, a group of 17 villages took part in a project funded by the Global Environment Facility to rehabilitate overexploited and highly vulnerable rangelands. Activities included the improvement of rangeland with native vegetation, the stabilization of sand dunes with trees and grass, and the creation of 195 kilometres of tree windbreaks. In the end, 700 hectares of rangeland were rehabilitated, resulting in increased soil cover, reduced soil erosion, greater carbon sequestration, increased biodiversity, and generally healthier ecosystems. I would like also to draw your attention to the LifeWeb Initiative, launched in Bonn at the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as an outstanding example of public-private partnership.

Not only can preserving biodiversity mitigate climate change, it can lessen the impacts of changes that do take place. For example, mangroves and coral reefs protect shorelines from the wind-generated

waves of storms and hurricanes. With this in mind, the National Chapter of the Red Cross in Viet Nam has been working with local communities to rehabilitate mangroves since 1994. Activities have included the planting and protection of mangroves and upland trees, disaster preparedness training and general awareness-raising about the value of mangroves. The success of this project was seen during Typhoon Wukong in 2000, when project areas remained unharmed while neighboring provinces suffered severe casualties and property damage.

Recognizing the relationships between biodiversity loss and climate change, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—the leading international framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity—have incorporated climate change into almost all of their programmes of work. Further recognizing the threat that biodiversity loss and its causes pose to humanity, we have also established a cross-cutting initiative called “Biodiversity for development and poverty alleviation”. Next year, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in October in Nagoya, Japan, we will be assessing the progress we have made toward the 2010 biodiversity target, which is “to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth”. We will also be formalizing a post-2010 biodiversity agenda. Needless to say, the generosity of private donors can only help as we take the next steps forward in preserving life on Earth.

Bill Gates once said: “Is the rich world aware of how four billion of the six billion live? If we were aware, we would want to help out, we’d want to get involved.” To which we may add: if only potential donors knew how much biodiversity loss worsens poverty and undermines international development efforts, they would want to contribute to the fight against it. Ultimately, we need donors like Bill Gates and George Soros, as well as many others, to step forward for biodiversity. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity; let us take this opportunity to redouble and extend our preservation efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed fitting that this first private donor meeting takes place in Berlin under the able stewardship of Germany, the President of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The German presidency has been unique and this forum is another unique contribution of Germany. The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010 will also be unique. I would like to invite you to consider convening your second meeting in Nagoya in conjunction with the high level segment to be held on 27-29 October 2010. In our common journey from Bonn to Nagoya through Berlin let us be inspired by the wisdom of another German, Martin Luther, who said “For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver”. Let us also be inspired by the quote that we just heard from the presentation of Mr. Douglas Tompkins, “when you love land you love eternity”. Indeed, love for humanity and love for life inspired the actions of Kris and Douglas Tompkins. Kris and Douglas, many thanks for your unique leadership. We look forward to welcoming you to Nagoya in October 2010.

Thank you for your kind attention.