

STATEMENT BY MR GIUSEPPE MARESCA

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Fourth GEF Assembly

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Mr Chairman, Mrs Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility, Fellow GEF Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Italian Government I am honoured to address the Fourth Assembly of the Global Environment Facility. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Uruguayan Authorities and the people of Punta del Este for their very warm hospitality. My great appreciation also goes to the GEF Secretariat for the excellent organization of this event.

The GEF

The Fourth GEF Assembly is being gathered at a critical momentum. The financial and economic crisis is making recent times the most difficult in the last decades, affecting the entire world at different levels of development.

Such circumstances add further difficulties in also dealing with environmental issues. Major environmental global challenges can and must be addressed effectively through focus and commitment, and in partnership with all members of the global community.

Despite the difficulties, today we are meeting to approve the Fifth Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund: the first tangible confirmation of the commitments made by the donor community in Copenhagen last December. The Fund is now in the position to increase its activity and scope: it is a strong signal of confidence in the capacity of the Facility to generate global environmental benefits.

My country has been struggling to keep public finance under control. In a period of financial

turmoil, the stability of our economies depends on the ability to reduce exposure to financial speculation. In such a situation we are maintaining our contributions to GEF. It is a smaller contribution than the GEF deserves, smaller than what we would have liked to pledge. But it is there.

The agreement on the Fifth Replenishment of GEF Trust Fund is based on the understanding that a set of reforms will be implemented to improve effectiveness, efficiency and accountability:

- The country ownership of the GEF global projects and programmes - We strongly believe national priorities and strategies shall be more closely reflected in GEF-financed activity: the formula for success is strengthening coordination and the decision-making process.
- Avoiding duplications with other International Financial Institutions. When resources are scarce - as this is obviously the case - maximizing efficiency is imperative. We expect the GEF to attract new cofinancing and develop new partnerships and, while recognising the efforts of the Earth Fund, we recommend that the GEF ensure stronger engagement with the private sector to foster innovation and open new markets.

With respect to the past, today the Global Environment Facility is perceived as a more accountable institution. We are pleased of the progress accomplished over the last few years, and encourage the GEF to explore additional instruments and actions to streamline the project cycle and refine its procedures. It is essential to strengthen the partnership with the GEF Agencies and other public and private co-financers, consistently with their comparative advantages. In this respect, we welcome the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Food Program (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as the new GEF Agencies.

Poverty alleviation and sustainable development

Recognising that the environment provides goods and services necessary for sustaining human development, in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we should focus on major links between poverty, environment and sustainable development.

Environmental matters deeply affect people living in poverty, as the poor often directly depend on a wide range of natural resources and ecosystem services. Environmental protection and development should be the core of national efforts aiming to eradicate poverty, and should thus be the main thrust of the common actions by the GEF and the international cooperation.

I wish to applaud the GEF work on climate change and land degradation - two key areas in the effort to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development..

Climate Change

Energy demand rapid growth is strongly requiring to address its own consequences. Our challenge is to identify an effective way to reduce its impact on environment and climate, while securing the energy demand for the modern industrialised society and the emerging economies:

- In accordance with the priorities expressed by the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Climate Change Convention in Copenhagen, we welcome the efforts so far accomplished by the GEF to provide financial resources for activities such as technology transfer and capacity-building in support to adaptation and mitigation actions;
- We look forward to attaining the most successful conclusion of a global, wide-ranging and ambitious post-2012 agreement in Cancun, involving all countries and consistently with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

Land Degradation

Desertification represents one of the most alarming processes of environmental degradation. It affects one third of the Earth surface and threatens health conditions and quality of life of approximately 2.6 billion people over one hundred countries. Italy is deeply keen on such theme, by virtue of our long-standing tradition of engagement in development cooperation projects both in arid and semi-arid zones, notably in Africa. Stopping desertification is key to the eradication of poverty and hunger in several regions:

- We applaud the decision to include land degradation focal areas in the new system for allocation of GEF resources, and strongly support the adoption of an integrated approach to natural resources management so as to include multiple global environmental actions such as protection and sustainable use of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and protection and sustainable use of international waters.

In concluding, while reiterating the firm commitment of the Italian Government to support the Global Environment Facility in the new challenges of this decade, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the CEO, Mrs Monique Barbut, and the women and men in the Secretariat, for their passionate work in contributing to our common goal: ensuring an environmental-friendly world.

Thank you for your attention.