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## Remarks

**Dr. Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson  
Global Environment Facility**

**Award Ceremony for the World Future Policy Award 2012  
The Philippines and Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park  
Tuesday, 16 October 2012, at 6:15 p.m.**

In 1999, the Global Environment Facility confirmed its support for the challenging effort to establish the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. Thirteen years later, I am very proud to present the Future Policy Award to the Government of Philippines for its Tubbataha Reefs National Park Act. This award recognizes the Philippines's vision and tireless effort to make the Tubbataha Park an essential asset for local prosperity and globally significant biodiversity conservation.

It seems so obvious a decision today. But at that time, the Philippines took a tough decision in setting about to establish the park. We should all be grateful that the government understood the importance of promoting and protecting the health of the ecosystem and its relationship to human health and sustainable development.

In the 1990's, the ecosystem health at Tubbataha was in general decline, along with the marine biodiversity of the region. The environmental degradation stemmed mainly from destructive and illegal fishing practices and unsustainable tourism development. The uncertain future of this Marine Protected Area called for immediate expansion of environmental management and conservation efforts – and the Philippines responded.

The designation of Tubbataha Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993 was a key first step in the quest for sustainable development of this area. The challenge was to eradicate destructive activities, develop

awareness and ownership of related stakeholders, and secure long-term financing.

A decade later, the reefs are in pristine condition, with exceptionally high coral and fish diversity, marine turtles, manta rays and sea birds. Local fishermen are reporting higher catches since the Marine Protected Area was created. Other provinces have adopted the policy established at Tubbataha of imposing penalties on boat owners for damaging reefs in ship-grounding incidents. The economic benefits derived from Tubbataha Park through fish catch and tourism have been estimated at more than US\$5.5 million per year.

From my perspective, this success of Tubbataha rests on three pillars:

- First, **decentralization**: The policy strengthens existing local-level institutions to ensure management and community liaison, and address illegal fishing.
- Second, **efficient and multi-stakeholder management**: The Park develops stakeholder agreements with local communities to involve them in the day-to-day life of the park and enable them to become the main beneficiaries of the Marine Protected Area. In this way, the Park promotes ownership.
- **Third, shared responsibility**: This spreads the costs and benefits of conservation equally among the stakeholders. Entry fees are collected

and redistributed to the core activities of the park and also to local inhabitants.

The world's oceans face unparalleled challenges, including overfishing, pollution, nutrient input from sewage and agriculture, sedimentation from terrestrial sources, and climate change and acidification. In response, bold and imaginative solutions exemplified by what we have done together at Tubbataha, are essential. Today, the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Act is a model for coral reef conservation. Already we are seeing similar legislation enacted in the neighboring Apo Reef.

I am proud that GEF has played a role in bringing about this transformational change. I hope and I fully expect that numerous and successful replications of the Tubbataha's model will be done in the near future.

Thank you.