

**SPEECH BY MADAME BRIGITTE GIRARDIN  
DEPUTY MINISTER OF CO-OPERATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THE  
PROMOTION OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE**

**AT THE OPENING  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
*“BIODIVERSITY IN EUROPEAN  
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION”***

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**- CCI KLÉBER -**

**TUESDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 2.30 P.M.**

Honoured guests, Ministers, Members of Parliament,  
Mr Director-General of the World Conservation Union,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

“Our house is burning down and we're blind to it. Nature, mutilated and overexploited, can no longer regenerate and we refuse to admit it. Humanity is suffering. It is suffering from poor development, in both the North and the South, and we stand indifferent. The earth and humankind are in danger and we are all responsible.”. These are the words spoken by the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

Have we stopped turning a blind eye since 2002?

The latest United Nations reports on the Millennium Development Goals or the assessment of the millennium for ecosystems, confirm that there has been an alarming loss of biodiversity. Since 2002, deforestation has affected an area the size of Costa Rica. Every year, 13,000,000 hectares of forest to give way to cultivated land. The disappearance of a primeval forest contributes to global warming, and with it we lose all the species that sheltered within it. It no longer fulfils its role in regulating the water cycle and thus opens the way to erosion and desertification. In the end, this increases the poverty of all the people living in the vicinity.

How many times must it be said that at the current rate, between a quarter and half of all species will have disappeared between now and the end of the century?

We know the disastrous consequences this will have for humanity. The overexploitation of marine resources, wildlife or water resources is having a more and more profound effect on people's lives. The recent report of the World Bank on the Wealth of Nations shows that a quarter of the gross national product of developing countries without oil resources depends on natural resources. The message could not be clearer.

Our responsibility is huge and making commitments is no longer enough. We will be judged according to our actions by future generations.

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For this reason, development aid provided by the French government continues to grow. In 2007, it will amount to €9 billion, or 0.5% of gross national product. And of course, the environment will benefit from this growth.

The French Global Environment Facility has thus been replenished and will stand at €70 million for the coming years. For France, it constitutes an instrument of bilateral cooperation, largely devoted to supporting projects in favour of biodiversity. The Global Environment Facility, as the financial instrument of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, has also been replenished for four years. France is its fifth largest contributor, providing an amount of €154 million.

France has also responded to the urgent appeal launched by Central African heads of state in Brazzaville in February 2005, for their debt to be cancelled in order to save the forest. The Cameroon Contract on Debt Relief and Development, which I recently signed, therefore provides €20 million for the protection and sustainable management of the forest. Since 2005, France has also provided facilitation to the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. More generally, France is pursuing its policy of cooperation on the basis of the Partnership's Framework Documents, defined with partner countries in the priority joint action zone, which essentially comprise African countries. In almost a third of those documents, the environment and the protection of biodiversity represent one of the three areas on which the bilateral French aid provided by the French Development Agency is concentrated.

Finally, we have also strengthened our partnership with the World Conservation Union by seconding a number of technical assistants, which will enable even more effective action to be taken for the protection of biodiversity, particularly in Africa.

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We must certainly increase the finance we provide, but above all it must be allocated and coordinated more effectively. We must also develop genuine worldwide scientific expertise on every environmental question.

The lack of interest shown in biodiversity in comparison to other challenges such as climate change, is very regrettable. Yet the accelerating collapse of biological diversity is indeed a major environmental crisis, one which is just as worrying as global warming. Everyone here is convinced of this.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change played a key role in increasing awareness about the reality of global warming, which was far from being accepted by everybody only a few years ago. In January 2005, the Biodiversity, Science and Governance Conference took place at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris, and the President of the Republic proposed that a mechanism be set up to spread the message of the scientific community on the subject of biodiversity, and to convince public opinion, the media and politicians of the urgency of action. We are now waiting for the conclusions of the international consultation on the feasibility of an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity.

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For a long time, the European Union, by its actions, has also shown a willingness to shoulder its responsibilities where international solidarity is concerned. The aid it provides has increased in accordance with its commitments. However, it now only devotes 0.7% of that aid to biodiversity.

The efforts in favour of solidarity made by the European Union and its Member States must therefore be targeted now on the three challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the eradication of poverty, climate change and the protection of biodiversity.

The target of devoting 5% of European aid to the environment and the protection of worldwide biodiversity, which has been mentioned on a number of occasions, appears to be reasonable. It is consistent with the necessary scaling up of

the actions that we take.

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In conclusion, I would like to extend my remarks to cover the fundamental question of international governance of the environment.

It is time for an institutional framework to be created for environmental matters, comparable to the other pillars of sustainable development, namely economics and social matters. Our current system is based on a heterogeneous set of more than 500 environmental conventions. Apart from its cost, this system lacks consistency and efficiency.

For this reason, France has proposed the setting up of a genuine United Nations Environmental Organisation. This body would have the necessary authority to mobilise scientific expertise, to alert public opinion to damage to the environment, to influence all players on the international scene, and finally to mobilise increased resources for the benefit of southern hemisphere countries.

We need your active support for this ambitious project. Joint action by governments, by non-governmental organisations and by scientists in favour of such an organisation will influence the current debate on the necessary reform of the United Nations in the area of the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted that the World Conservation Union continues to demonstrate the important role that it has to play today. Since its creation in France in 1948, it has succeeded in raising awareness among international opinion, advising politicians and promoting initiatives on the ground in favour of the preservation of worldwide biodiversity. Its role as a catalyst of international reflection can clearly be seen today in the organisation of this conference.

Your attendance here in such numbers shows the growing importance that the authorities in your countries attached to this collective challenge of the 21st century, to reduce the erosion of worldwide biodiversity. Your accounts, your thoughts and your proposals will assist the European Commission, the Member States and their partner countries to meet this challenge together.

I wish you continued success in your excellent work, and assure you that France will pay the greatest attention to your recommendations.