



## **Speech of the UNEP Executive Director**

### **Intergovernmental Meeting on Great Apes and first Council Meeting of the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP)**

9 September 2005 – Kinshasa, DRC

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Your Excellency, Mr. Joseph Kabila, president of DRC

Your Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo,

Your Excellency Mr. President of Cameroon

Your Excellencies Vice presidents of the DRC

Distinguished Ministers

Distinguished members of the DRC Government

Mr. Walter Erdelen

Distinguished members of the diplomatic corps

Distinguished representatives of Range state governments, donor governments

GRASP Patrons and Partners,

Colleagues and partners from UNESCO and other UN agencies,

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

Allow me first to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the government of the DRC for hosting this first Intergovernmental meeting on the Great Apes and to His Excellency Mr President for his leadership and personal interest in organizing this successful meeting.

Indeed the IGM and associated GRASP council meeting succeeded in achieving remarkable results and chart the way forward for concerted action to address the extinction threat facing many population of great apes. I congratulate you all for a job well done.

Particularly, because it is not an easy job: one of the major challenges faced is to balance the survival needs of the great ape populations, and the economic and social well-being of the local human populations.

Forest preservation, great ape protection, and empowerment of local populations have however not to be contradictory objectives. This meeting borne witness to fact, that if the

political will and necessary resources are there, these goals can go hand in hand. The meeting indicated the resolve of states and partners to address this challenge. I wish to congratulate you on the results achieved.

This meeting was more than drafting a declaration, as important this is, and agreeing on rules and regulation for the GRASP partnership. It was also about creating ownership, forwarding action on the ground, forming a real partnership whereby every partner contributes to a common cause: the protection of great apes and the habitat they inhabit, the forests.

GRASP, the partnership on great apes that was initiated by UNEP in 2001, aims indeed at addressing the wide range of threats to great apes. These are habitat loss and fragmentation, industrial and small-scale conversion of forests, hunting for bushmeat and capture for trade, as well as war and local conflicts and disease. This range of threats requires a varied range of responses, partners, and approaches. Underlying these is the necessity for cooperation. This meeting has made substantive progress in fostering this cooperation.

[Excellencies, the Virungas volcanoes conservation area provides an excellent example of how cooperation in great ape conservation activities has fostered cross-border collaboration. This area, shared by the DR Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, is widely regarded as an international model of effective transboundary cooperation for conservation. Despite more than 10 years of conflict in the region, the population of mountain gorillas has increased by 17 per cent since 1989. And their habitat has been largely protected throughout the period. ]

Considerable attention has also been given in this meeting to great ape habitats – forests. Many great ape populations live in some of the most biologically rich areas on Earth. These forests are vital to humans and other species for food, water, medicine and timber. At the same time, great apes are vital to the forest: they disperse and fertilize plant seeds, and they also snap branches, creating important breaks for sunlight in the forest canopy, maintaining the balance of this ecosystem.

Forests are also essential for regulating the global climate. The carbon sequestration and storage capacity of the world's tropical forests is now estimated to be worth \$60 billion a year. This economic value has implications for great ape populations: scientists are looking at applying the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism funding opportunities to a reforestation project in the DR Congo. This will benefit both the bonobo populations in the region, as well as the local human populations, who depend on the ecosystem services these forests provide. As Dr Leakey mentioned in this opening remark, addressing the impact of climate variability is an issue the alliance established here in Kinshasa, might wish to address in the future.

GRASP as one of the pillar or the global strategy you just adopted had made remarkable headway in addressing the challenges inherent in great ape protection and will certainly continue to grow after this effective and successful meeting.

Because of this consistent record of successes and achievements, UNEP is very pleased to be a co-host of the GRASP Secretariat and to have provided the secretariat to this first Intergovernmental meeting on great apes, jointly with UNESCO. UNEP – also a GRASP partner – has provided about \$1 million in salaries and funding. In addition, UNEP has

provided other types of support – for example, UNEP provided emergency resources to address settler encroachment in the Virungas National Park in DR Congo, which – in cooperation with GRASP partners and local communities – was used to build a demarcation wall around the affected section of the park. More recently, UNEP has awarded \$80,000 in funding to a local conservation education centre in eastern DR Congo to implement awareness raising and poverty alleviation activities. And of course today you have seen the UNEP-WCMC publication of the World Atlas of Great Apes and their Conservation which I had the pleasure to launch in London last week.

And finally; I am pleased to announce that UNEP will host the first meeting of the CITES task force on Great Apes in Nairobi next year.

These innovative and collaborative activities will continue to be undertaken by GRASP in the future. I wish to encourage all range States and local civil society groups to actively participate in GRASP.

Listening to the proceedings that have taken place this week, I am confident that GRASP Partners will continue to promote and undertake collaborative efforts toward great ape conservation with continued success. Each of us has a role in ensuring the GRASP Partnership flourishes: whether it is providing technical assistance, mobilizing funds, or developing action plans, all Partners must strive toward cooperative and innovative action. UNEP is eager to continue supporting the Partnership, and looks forward to forthcoming initiatives and activities with the Partners toward an assured future for great apes.

Once again Mr President, thank you for supporting this important initiative and hosting the meeting.

Thank you.