

Statement by GRASP Patron Toshisada Nishida To be presented on 9 September 2005

Good afternoon:

1. My presentation today concerns the newly-founded GRASP-Japan, and its proposed activities.
2. The great apes are the closest relatives of human beings. For example, African great apes lie on their back, lift and shake their infants on their feet to play with them. So, we share the same aeroplane posture with great apes at least since 9 million years ago.
3. There are many other common behaviour patterns which include complex social behaviour and food-processing techniques.
4. And, many local behaviour patterns are so different that species of the great apes are not only genetically and ecologically different, but also culturally different.
5. Great apes also play an important role of maintaining and restoring the tropical forest ecosystem
6. by dispersing seeds of fruits which they eat. Seeds that pass through the apes' gut germinate more quickly than those that fall from mature trees.
7. Japanese research on wild great apes began in 1958 when the late Kinji Imanishi made an expedition on the search for gorillas to Cameroon, Uganda, DRC and Rwanda.
8. Since then Japanese research has covered the 8 most important of the 23 great apes habitat countries.
9. In order to take the initiative in conservation of great apes, we established the GRASP-Japan in March 2004. I believe that this initiative is a unique form of conservation activities since it brings together all the active Japanese researchers of the great apes. GRASP-Japan is backed up by an array of famous figures including actresses, CEOs of private companies, ex-government officers et cetera.

10. The mission of GRASP-Japan is:

- (1) Strengthen ongoing research and conservation activities,
- (2) Make effort in public awareness regarding the scientific, cultural and conservation importance of great apes, for example, through the presentations at UN Pavillion in Aichi EXPO 2005,
- (3) Provide GRASP HQ with key local information,

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- (4) Promote the establishment of the World Heritage Species Concept,
- (5) Lobby the Japanese Government regarding proposals of new JICA projects that are relevant to conservation of great apes and the restriction scheme of import of tropical rain forest timber,
- (6) Organize fund-raising activities,

12. The fund we raise should go directly to each site under the supervision of researchers. In addition, GRASP-Japan will support the GRASP Secretariat technically and financially, since we have been strongly assisted by UNEP & UNESCO.

13. We have seven major projects of GRASP-Japan at hand and have formulated action plans relevant to local conditions of each site.

14. In Kalimantan, Indonesia, a colleague has continued his research at Kutai National Park, and recently he has found a promising site harbouring many orangutans. So, assessment of environment including the population density of orangutans and boundary determination should be a main task by the GRASP-Japan.

15. In SE Guinea there are many isolated populations of chimpanzees, and it is necessary to connect these populations with a much larger population of the Nimba Mountains of Ivory coast. So, researchers have begun the Green Corridor Project by planting seedlings of indigenous forest trees.

16. In Tanzania, Mahale Mountains National Park has no serious problem right now,

17. however, in many parts of western Tanzania to the NE of Mahale, there is a problem of severe selective logging of *Pterocarpus* trees that are an important diet to chimpanzees. The habitat also has been unsustainably used by refugees from neighboring countries who neglect traditional land use custom and have no taboo against eating chimps
18. The Ugalla-Masito area is the driest environment that chimpanzees inhabit, in addition to the easternmost boundary of the chimpanzee distribution. So, the landscape is said to resemble the model habitat of human origins. Moreover, the area is adjoining to the treasure house of water birds, which, I think, should be conserved by the Ramsar Convention. So, we propose the establishment of a new national park here.
19. In Kalinzu Forest, Uganda, logging is proceeding in the forest inhabited by chimpanzees and snares intended for non-chimp mammals often injure chimpanzees. Envisaged solution is ecotourism and conservation education.
20. This is a very important population of Uganda because if the connected area with the Maramagambo Forest is taken into consideration, the population amounts to more than 750 individuals.
21. If logging is stopped, of course, local people will lose income. Researchers have proposed a high-quality eco-tourism and this strategy was acknowledged by the Ugandan , government.
22. Conservation education has also been going on to raise awareness among primary school children, whose main purpose is to teach them the similarity of chimps to humans.
23. The Moukalaba National Park in Gabon boasts of remarkable biodiversity and has as many as 12 diurnal primates.
24. Gabon's problem is that timber is exported as cheap logs and so people do not get the real value worth to the item. Moreover, logging roads stimulate commercial hunting.
25. Problems in Moukalaba included (1) unemployment by withdrawal of logging

companies, (2) collapse of livelihood, (3) disintegration of villages, (4) migration of people, and (5) reliance on bushmeat

26. Researchers have persuaded local women to exclude gorilla and chimpanzees from the bushmeat trade by showing the similarity of great apes to human beings. They are also planning the introduction of ape eco-tourism as a tangible benefit for not eating apes.

27. Now, I am introducing our last two projects that have had the most serious problem. Both concerns the Democratic Republic of Congo. The first is the highland sector of Kahuzi-Biega National Park.

28. In terms of both number of individuals and groups, fifty percent of gorillas disappeared between 1990 and 2000 when civil war occurred.

29. During the war, illegal activities within the park increased tremendously. These included cutting bamboo, cutting trees for charcoal production, and mining gold and coltan. Illegal activities occurred not only because refugees sought for only short-sighted benefit from the environment but because some inhabitants had bad feelings towards park rangers.

30. A researcher has helped to establish the local NGO POPOF and made effort to reduce the conflict between the park and local people by raising the standard living of the inhabitants.

31. The activities have included the building of a plant nursery center, art and handicraft center, construction of a school and conservation education.

32. The last project I am introducing was implemented at Wamba in the Equatorial Region.

33. Wamba was the paradise of bonobos until the late 1980s. There were 350 bonobos in an area of 150 sq. km. This high population density of bonobos was celebrated by the peaceful coexistence of bonobos and local people who had strict taboo against eating

bonobos. Researchers had also strong ties with local people by providing employment and medical service.

34. Researchers proposed the establishment of the Luo Scientific Reserve to local communities and to the central government, and this was negotiated successfully in 1990.

Within the reserve, the following conduct was prohibited;

- a. Capturing bonobos and monkeys,
- b. Use of guns, wire snare or venom arrows,
- c. Clearing the primary forest,

35. However, this rule was observed only until the civil war broke out. During the civil war, the conditions changed drastically. Soldiers and refugees neglected traditional customs and the code of conduct contracted between researchers, government and the original villagers.

36. Thus, the number of bonobos decreased from 900 to 300.

37. The current activities by researchers are multifold: they include almost all aspects to improve the welfare of villagers whose standard of living had been badly affected during the war.

38. So, the lesson we obtain from these two tragic cases is that conservation scheme must be able to cope with wartime crisis, and that residents with a long history of residence are much more likely to observe the code of conduct for sustainable exploitation of natural resources.

Now I must conclude my remarks. It is regrettable that despite the fact that the Kahuzi-Biega was designated as the World Heritage Site, the gorillas could not be protected. The United Nations should bring a stronger mechanism to conserve the natural heritage sites, for example, by mobilizing the PKO to patrol the habitat during wartime.

GRASP should not end as a short-term project. It should not be fireworks of 5 years or so. Before GRASP ends, it should leave a strong mechanism to maintain the great ape habitat. One of such mechanisms should be to help-sustain considerable number of long-term scientific research in the prioritized regions of the range countries, in addition to the PKO arrangement during wartime.

Thank you.