

Great Ape Survival Project

Intergovernmental Meeting: 5-9 September 2005

Opening Statement by the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom would like to express its gratitude to the Democratic Republic of Congo for hosting this first Intergovernmental Meeting of the GRASP Partnership. In particular, the speech of H.E. the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, delivered by H.E. the Vice-resident this morning, demonstrated not only the commitment of the Government of the democratic Republic of Congo, but also considerable understanding of the complex and difficult issues facing great apes.

The UK Government Minister for Biodiversity, Mr Jim Knight, will be addressing the conference on Friday during the high-level segment, so I do not wish to anticipate his remarks or indeed to duplicate them.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Intergovernmental meeting. While content to see so many of the Range State governments present, I am slightly disappointed that, in the event, it has proved too difficult for many of the possible donor countries to participate this week at a Ministerial level, especially given that this meeting so importantly takes place in Africa, and in one of the Range States themselves.

As many of you may be aware, the UK has been a partner in the GRASP since its inception, and has maintained support throughout, both for its objectives, and with funding to try to meet them.

We shall of course continue to support the initiative.

It must be remembered here that much support, in particular that of a strategic financial nature, can be generated by setting great-ape conservation within the wider context of economic development and poverty reduction. It is a truism, but nonetheless worth repeating, that systematic depletion of our environmental resources not only leads to the bankruptcy of our environment, it also inevitably leads to the degeneration of our economic and social structures. It follows that we all need to work together to develop comprehensive solutions that are set in the over-riding contexts of poverty reduction and economic development.

We believe that the partners to GRASP and the Project itself has the potential to deliver on its aims, especially if it takes account of this wider context.

It is an honour to be invited to chair the working group on the draft Declaration, and I shall look forward to collaborating with all Partners who

wish to participate to come up with a text that will inspire both ourselves and the community that has not yet engaged in this process.

I shall of course speak more about the details of the proposed open-ended working group when the distinguished chair requests it.

Thank you.