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Speech

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Prime Minister Putin, Distinguished Ministers, Mr. Zoellick, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my immense pleasure to be here with all of you today, in the world's most beautiful city. Coming from Paris, I am sure you will appreciate I am not saying this lightly!

Beyond our great surroundings, this is a remarkable gathering - and one that does not happen very often in the international conservation arena. The political, financial and technical firepower in this room is more than sufficient to change the course for the wild tiger. And this is something that must happen, for the biodiversity of the habitats it depends upon, and for the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people in more than a dozen countries.

I say this because every time a tiger habitat disappears, it is not just the tiger who is lost. We lose too: ecosystems provide vital services to humans for their own survival. In short, if we allow tigers to go extinct, then our own future as a species hangs in the balance as well.

We are here today committed to change the path for the tiger. The GEF has been a pioneer partner with the World Bank and others in the development of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP), and with Russia in the preparation for this hallmark summit.

Over the course of a decade, tens of millions of dollars in GEF grants have also been awarded to tiger range countries for projects intended to protect tiger habitat. These investments were in large part successful in protecting key habitats.

But the fact remains that we have not stopped the hemorrhaging when it comes to losing wild tigers in nature. I am not exactly sure why this happened, but I suspect we didn't have our eyes on the ball at times. Now we can't fail, as this renewed opportunity is bound to be the last one for the wild tiger.

We are fully committed to following the leadership of the countries in this journey. And like all of you, we too are looking for something that is different from the efforts of the past, and that can really become a game changer for the tiger.

I am not a tiger specialist, but from a funder's perspective, I believe that a certain number of quite obvious elements need to be brought to the frontline of priorities if we are to succeed, and for which I believe there is already a high degree of agreement around.

First, we can't recover tiger populations if poaching continues at the current levels. Second, immediate protection measures must be introduced at the source sites where the majority of the world's remaining tigers exist.

Third, if we do all this but refrain from looking beyond these key priority sites, we may win this first battle but will surely lose the war. Therefore, we must also address land use issues at a much larger landscape scale.

Finally, if all this means nothing for local people, we will have prolonged the agony of wild tigers AND risked their survival into the future.

Let's now talk business. At the GEF, we are ready to move with the World Bank attending to the priorities of all countries here today. We understand that a certain number of countries have come forward with commitments to program some \$35 million of their GEF country allocations for action on behalf of the tiger. If these projects make sense, I am ready to support them.

But I don't think this would go beyond business as usual. If these investments are designed to produce benefits for biodiversity beyond the tiger and also result in the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the GEF could provide countries with an additional \$12 million from our REDD+ incentive mechanism, as well some support to a needed coordination mechanism at the regional level.

Therefore, we could be approaching close to \$50 million in potential GEF grant resources for this initiative, provided that cofinancing leverage is secured. We believe that such a significant commitment by the GEF is definitely bound to attract the necessary resources from other donors and from the countries themselves.

However, this more ambitious scenario requires that a suitable governance structure among donors, tiger range countries and other significant players is agreed on. Specifically, one that is conducive toward directing resources strategically to countries. We firmly believe that such a structure is essential. Otherwise, as we have seen in other cases recently, the fragmentation of resource delivery will work against the objectives of the program and will make it difficult for countries to access what they need.

I came here prepared to speak concretely about the GEF commitment to this initiative because this is a natural progression from the early investments we have made in the development of the GTRP and supporting this summit. As it has been the case from the beginning, our implementing partner for this initiative will be the World Bank, but we also expect national executing entities as well as qualifying NGOs to make significant contributions to this effort, including through additional financial resources.

Let me conclude by saying that nothing will come out of this incredible amount of energy concentrated here if the countries are not in the driver's seat. Country ownership is now a hallmark of the GEF and I intend to follow this principle throughout this initiative.

But let me also recognize that for the most difficult of global challenges, it takes enlightened leadership to get great ideas to flourish. Without vision and determination, many inspired proposals end up sinking without a trace. It is groundbreaking that an institution like the World Bank is embracing this renewed call to save the tiger, an unusual undertaking for a development institution. But without a shadow of a doubt, it has been the vision of one individual - Bob Zoellick - that really brought us all together. Thank you, Bob.

It's now time to move from words to action, and we will be there with you in full force.