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For Immediate Release

FIRST COUNTRIES EMBRACE THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF U.N. MILLENNIUM PROJECT TASK FORCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

"Environmental Sustainability is Essential and Achievable," Declare Dominican Republic and Papua New Guinea Leaders at Event Hosted by U.N. Millennium Project Task Force Chair From Columbia University and CERC

New York, NY; March 7, 2005 – The Task Force on Environmental Sustainability, part of the United Nations Millennium Project commissioned by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2002, and directed by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, today announced that the Dominican Republic and Papua New Guinea are the first countries to adopt and begin implementation of a series of recommendations made by the Task Force for addressing environmental concerns, which are often at the root of economic instability and poverty. The Task Force's ten recommendations form the centerpiece of its report, delivered to the U.N. this month, called *Environment and Human Well-being: A Practical Strategy*.

"Today marks an historic moment when the forward-thinking leaders of two developing countries, the Dominican Republic and Papua New Guinea, embrace not just the principles of environmental sustainability but its practical applications," said **Prof. Don Melnick of Columbia University, one of the report's principal authors and the head of the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC)**.

The embrace of the Task Force report's agenda by the Dominican Republic and Papua New Guinea is significant because both countries face the specter of climate change, sea level rise, freshwater shortage and deforestation more immediately than countries on larger continental land masses. These countries are now developing implementation plans to realize the new, comprehensive agenda, where achieving environmental sustainability is central to the global responsibility to combat poverty, hunger, disease and gender disparity, as encapsulated in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Prof. Melnick made his remarks at a briefing in New York where he welcomed high-ranking officials from the Dominican Republic and Papua New Guinea. They described the concrete steps their countries were taking to realize both environmental sustainability and economic development by linking economic incentives and investment opportunities with sustainable environmental practices, as outlined in the Task Force's recommendations.

Sir Rabbie Namaliu, PNG's Minister for Foreign Affairs, said, "The release of *Environment and Human Well-Being: A Practical Strategy* is truly an extraordinary accomplishment in the history of international development. Never has the World been given a more compelling environmental agenda with such dramatic global implications. Considering that we all share one global environment, my Nation is challenged to take leadership for the greater benefit of all humanity."

“Environmental sustainability is good business because it cuts current costs and provides opportunities for future investments,” said Prof. Melnick. “Furthermore, environmental sustainability is good public policy because it draws efficiently from nature’s free services and reduces outlays necessary to cover natural disasters; and it is good personal security because it reduces the risks of disease, economic dislocation, and social upheaval.”

The Challenge: Environmental Sustainability vs. Human Development

Environmental degradation is at the center of much of the global development agenda, and the challenge is formidable given its rapid pace and its widespread consequences for national and local economies, human health, and national security. Key problems include:

- Indoor air pollution from burning wood, dung, kerosene and other "dirty" fuels kills nearly 2.5 million children each year;
- Forests covering an area equivalent to the approximate size of Surinam or Bangladesh (14.2 thousand square-km) have been destroyed each year during the past decade resulting in landslides, loss of valuable topsoil, and carbon emissions;
- Over-fishing has accounted for the loss of 90 percent of the world's 19 top ocean predators (such as tuna, swordfish) threatening the livelihoods of fishers the world over and causing changes in the ocean's ecological food chain;
- One-third of worldwide water use currently depends on unsustainable water withdrawals, leading to saline contamination of freshwater sources, lowered water tables, and ground subsidence.

Moving Towards a Solution

Environmental sustainability means sustaining the environment while meeting current and future human needs without undermining the capacity of the environment to provide for those needs over the long term. Worldwide environmental losses, while gravely serious, are not yet irrevocable, as efforts around the world demonstrate:

- **The Government of South Africa** began paying citizens to clean up waterways in 1996 by removing invasive plants such as water hyacinth and eucalyptus. This successful public-private partnership serves to combat two wrongs: widespread unemployment and environmental degradation.
- **Helados Bon, a private ice cream company in the Dominican Republic**, began supporting local organic agriculture and diversified farming systems by buying local fruits and organic produce for their ice cream. The family-run company also established, in 1992, the Loma de Quita Espuela Scientific Reserve on one of the country's mountain ranges to protect the headwaters of several of the country's important rivers.
- **New York City Watershed** - To reduce water pollution at the source and help New York City avoid installation of a \$4-6 billion filtration system that otherwise would be required to meet federal clean-water standards, the NYC Department of Environmental Protection developed a comprehensive long-range watershed protection program in 1989. In 1997 the city and towns of the Catskill/Hudson watershed signed the Watershed Memorandum of Agreement. The program has enabled NYC to avoid the expected doubling of water use fees for city users.
- **Chiquita Brands International** – With help from the Rainforest Alliance, based in New York, Chiquita Brands International, Inc. has transformed farming practices and become an industry leader in implementing an environmentally and socially sustainable production strategy. Market-driven initiatives and certification by an independent agency has provided the mechanisms by which Chiquita can ensure quality control for environmental practices and

working conditions, incorporating techniques based in sound science. By year 2000, one hundred percent of Chiquita's owned farms were certified by Rainforest Alliance.

- **The Green Belt movement of Kenya**, led by Nobel Peace Prize 2004 winner Wangari Maathai, planted 30 million trees around Kenya serving to improve access to fuelwood, improve soil quality and provide employment to local women.

These civic, government and private initiatives are examples of the steps that need to be replicated often and everywhere in the world to help the global community achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Valentine Kambori, Secretary, Department of National Planning of Papua New Guinea, who is in charge of implementation of all MDG's, applauded these efforts, adding, "The most effective way to eradicate poverty while sustaining the environment is to harness private initiative and infuse capitalistic pursuit with a sense of global accountability. Sustainable development can only be achieved through balanced economical and environmental policy, a relationship the Task Force report effectively captures."

In October 2004, **Dominican President Leonel Fernández** established a Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES). The Commission is in charge of monitoring and evaluating the country's progress towards achieving the U.N. Millennium Development Goals and includes the participation of representatives from various sectors such as government, private sector, civil society and the United Nations.

Dr. Max Puig, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, who is the chair of the Commission's working group on environmental sustainability, said, "We are committed to working together with all government institutions; including local governments, businesses and civil society" in order to enable the country to sustain the environment. To this end the environment working group is developing a needs assessment to determine the gaps in technical and institutional capacity to address Millennium Development Goal 7 on environmental sustainability.

About The Task Force on Environmental Sustainability

The Task Force on Environmental Sustainability is one of 10 UN Millennium Project Task Forces that together comprise some 265 experts from around the world, including members of parliament, researchers and scientists, policymakers, representatives of civil society, UN agencies, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the private sector. For more information, visit www.unmillenniumproject.org.

About The Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC)

CERC is an unrivaled consortium of world class scientific institutions: Columbia University, the American Museum of Natural History, The New York Botanical Garden, Wildlife Conservation Society and Wildlife Trust, whose mission is to build environmental leadership and find long-term solutions to combat the loss of biological diversity and natural resource depletion - while meeting the needs of a growing worldwide human population. Founded in 1994, CERC is a member of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. For more information, visit www.cerc.columbia.edu.

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THE UN TASK FORCE REPORT
Environment and Human Well-being: A Practical Strategy

Key recommendations

1. **Developed and undeveloped countries must reduce their use of carbon-based energy** (coal, oil, gas) to address the growing threat of climate change. Private and public sectors must invest in cost-effective and environmentally sustainable energy to reduce deforestation, carbon emissions, and labor for girls and women, who are the primary collectors of fuelwood in developing countries.
 2. **Environmental management and restoration activities can generate employment opportunities for local people and profit opportunities for businesses.** Revegetation activities, removal of alien invasive species, waste cleanup, and building better infrastructure all work for people and the environment.
 3. **Countries must factor in costs for ecosystem services (e.g. natural watersheds) to reflect the true costs of development of natural areas.** Including the value of ecosystems in planning is the most direct way to support the environment.
 4. **Policy changes specified in the report include:**
 - a. *Tax structure* – change tax structures to support environmentally sustainable behaviors, and to allocate funds to environmental purposes;
 - b. *Governance* – provide communities and individual landowners with control over resources, and with incentives to manage those resources;
 - c. *Laws and regulations* – for forest and natural resources that provide (i) opportunities for conservation, (ii) incentives for sustainable management at all scales (large timber companies as well as small private landowners); and (iii) incentives for restoration.
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