



Mr. Robert B. Zoellick
President of the World Bank

Global Tiger Initiative
World Bank—Smithsonian Institution Partnership Launch
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President Zoellick's Remarks

Thank you very much, Dr. Clough, and thanks to all of you for joining us today. I'm sure you must have the same feeling I do, which is whenever you walk into the Smithsonian, your eyes start to go towards all the things on the walls and the sides, so you're trying to be introduced to people or go on to an event, but this is just such a feast to be here.

As I think all of you know, a year ago we launched the Global Tiger Initiative. It was a little bit of a warmer day at the National Zoo, so I'm glad we could do this one in an air-conditioned environment. But the purpose remains absolutely the same, which is to try to help stabilize and restore the wild tiger population and their habitats.

To ensure that we keep our eye on the ball, or, in this case, the tiger, I wanted us to meet in public again to recognize another step in the partnership between the Smithsonian Institution and the World Bank Group, but also to check on our progress.

We're here today because we share a belief that the extinction of the wild tiger and its natural habitat would be an extraordinary tragedy. It would be a tragedy not only because of the appalling loss of these beautiful animals, but also because it would pose a threat to the health of the habitats in which they live and the prey populations that support them.

By working to save the wild tigers, we're protecting a majestic animal so it can be discovered and admired by future generations and can continue to stir the imagination of humankind. But at the same time, we're preserving the biodiversity of our planet.

So, I want to thank Dr. Clough, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and Steve Monfort, the Acting Director of the Smithsonian's National Zoo, who was kind enough to take me around the Front Royal facility, for their extraordinary partnership in this endeavor.

We know that the Smithsonian Institution brings unmatched experience and commitment to the study, management, protection, and restoration of threatened species and ecosystems. So, wild tigers could not have a better team on their side.

I also want to thank the members of Congress that have been involved with this, including Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo, who will be addressing us later. And I also wanted to welcome Dr. Eric Dinerstein, the Vice President and Chief Scientist at the World Wildlife Fund, whose conservation work has dated back some 35 years; and Pavan Sukhdev, of Deutsche Bank, who is trying out a methodology very important for valuing the economic loss of biodiversity and ecosystems.

I also want to thank a number of my colleagues at the World Bank who are here with us today. What's been extraordinary is that this idea developed in our institution, which covers 185 member states. We're in some 120 countries. How many people have taken the time and effort to try to integrate this in all aspects of their work, whether it be on trafficking, in the biodiversity area for some of the forest lands for the tigers, or in other efforts to link it to an effective and sustainable economic development. They've really done a fantastic job.

The issue that draws us together, of course, is that tigers and their habitats are vanishing from Asia, and their numbers are absolutely shocking: In the last century, 100,000 tigers roamed the wild. Today, that number has plummeted to 3,500, and very few people know that number.

I had a conversation with Prime Minister Rudd of Australia, a friend for many years. I pointed out at that time we were estimating 4,000, and he was absolutely shocked; and he said, "What can we in Australia do to be of help?"

Tigers now occupy only seven percent of their original range. Now, when we lose material assets, they can be replaced or rebuilt. But when a plant or an animal species disappears, the damage is irreparable, and the loss reverberates down the food chain. So, the extinction of the tiger threatens wildlife across all of Asia.

We know what's causing the decline in numbers of wild tigers: illegal poaching, illegal wildlife trade, loss of habitat through conversion, encroachment, and land degradation. But the good news is that we also learned that tiger populations can recover. To do so, we have to target the illicit demand that drives tiger decline, because the illegal trade in wildlife is nothing more than organized crime. In fact, it's the third largest form of organized crime, after the arms and the drugs trades.

So we have to turn up the heat on the illegal poachers and traders. For example, China and the United States are the world's largest wildlife consuming countries, with 20 percent of the global trade destined for the United States. There's an enormous potential for reducing the global demand for tiger products if these two countries can work together more closely to tighten law enforcement and fundamentally to change attitudes, because curbing demand must also involve raising awareness of the value and the symbolism of live tigers rather than just tiger parts.

We also have to protect the habitat of wild tigers. And here, the private sector, we've seen, can play a very critical role. Corporations have been deeply engaged in tiger and habitat conservation for decades through financial contributions to conservation efforts in developing countries.

ExxonMobil's leadership, as a founding partner in the Save the Tiger Fund, has been a terrific example. It's leveraged more than \$30 million to save tigers, preserve their habitats, and support neighboring communities over the last 15 years. But we have to do much more. We need to safeguard all the existing tiger landscapes from pressures that are imposed by pollution, road construction, development, and exploration.

So, saving the tiger in the wild is a global challenge, and we won't succeed if we work alone. If we work together, we can leverage each other's skills, knowledge, experience, creativity, and resources to achieve what has to be a common goal. The Global Tiger Initiative was conceived with this notion of building an alliance in mind, to bring together a range of partners, from governments, global NGOs, international organizations, the scientific world, and the private sector, to help bring tigers back from the brink.

We've made progress on several fronts since we launched this initiative last June. The World Bank Group is now engaging the governments of all the tiger-range countries and intergovernmental organizations at high political levels. We're starting to change the conversation on key issues, such as crime detection and prevention, better management of habitats, improving infrastructure planning, reducing demand for illegal tiger parts, and offering poaching communities alternative economic opportunities.

So I'm pleased to report that there's a new energy and sense of urgency about tiger conservation in this dialogue. It's not just words. This April, the government of Thailand hosted a very important regional conference in Pattaya to support the Global Tiger Initiative, and it was focused particularly on illegal trade and trafficking in endangered species.

We're working with some of the senior police officials in the ASEAN countries to get at this core target. And the workshop provided a stimulus to commit senior leaders from tiger-range countries to take effective steps towards tiger conservation and strengthen cooperation across borders. Thailand's Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, for example, has called for the creation of a ministerial steering committee to provide much-needed political support for the issue of tiger conservation.

Those of you that have dealt with the topics of CITES over the years have known about the wildlife trafficking trade, including throughout Southeast Asia. This is a stupendous development, and we don't have a chance unless we bring the countries of Southeast Asia into this process. It's extremely encouraging to me the leadership that Thailand has played, and most of the ASEAN countries are participating in this effort.

At the workshop, 21 countries and international organizations endorsed the Pattaya Manifesto, a call to action for effective and coordinated efforts to combat wildlife crime by tightening the laws, the legislation, and the enforcement.

Today, we're taking another very important step forward with a new program under the Global Tiger Initiative, as Dr. Clough mentioned. With this agreement, the Smithsonian Institution and the World Bank Group are together pledging more than \$1 million over the next year to establish the Global Conservation and Development Network.

The idea of this network is to try to link global knowledge centers and institutions in China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Thailand, and other tiger-range countries with globally significant centers of excellence in conservation science and critically professional training. Our aim is to try to share information quickly and effectively about poaching, illegal trade and trafficking, and conservation activities.

And the Smithsonian National Zoo's Conservation Research Center in Virginia will serve as one of the initial launch pads for development of this global network. That's why I went out to Front Royal, and I can just see the seeds of something very, very important.

Having worked in the field of economics and development for some decades, I've watched over my lifetime what a difference it's made when you start to bring in people from all around the world that have some common sense of the issues, some common experience and training, and that's one of the things that we're so delighted that the Smithsonian is offering the world, in terms of training and experience in getting together the ideas from people from all across different tiger-range countries, and how we can try to address this challenge.

Our goal is to train hundreds of rangers, foresters, and other habitat managers in tiger-range countries on the leading edge practices in biodiversity management with, of course, a specific focus on how they have more effective preservation and increase the wild tiger population.

This won't work if it just comes out of Washington or North America or Europe. It has to be embedded in the tiger-range countries, and the best ambassadors for that effort will be people from those countries that come to a project like this, see how they can be part of a larger network, strengthen their tools, strengthen their resources, and they'll be the ones that are most successful.

And that's why we also have to expand our alliance to include other members, and that includes trying to secure additional financing. So, we hope that this partnership and this program can serve as a cornerstone for the Global Tiger Initiative's efforts to prioritize actions, generate political will, and fundamentally--core point--change attitudes so that wild tigers can remain part of our future.

Next year, 2010, will be the Year of the Tiger. So, it's a fitting time to hold the first Global Tiger Summit, where we're going to try to bring together global leaders and partners in the various countries of the Global Tiger Initiative to try to discuss the

commitments we've made, and we hope concrete and stronger and urgent actions on the ground.

There are going to be some important meetings held in the next few months as a lead up to this summit, to use it to drive action, hosted by the governments of Nepal and Thailand.

Supporting tiger conservation is part of a greater global economic development challenge. In my office at the World Bank Group, I have a magnificent painting of a wild tiger that is painted by tribal artists who live in and around a national park in northern India.

Now some of these tigers have turned out to be multi-million-dollar earners, because, quite literally, they are the equivalent of sporting stars or Bollywood actors, but more importantly, by doing so, they can provide the livelihoods for thousands of people, from forest guards and wildlife guides to drivers, hoteliers, and artists, because the painting in my office not only reminds me of these extraordinary cats each and every day, but it also showcases their value alive rather than dead.

It's an example of the economic benefits that can come from preserving a species in the wild and why it's so important that we remember that these animals are part of the national heritage of the countries.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way that its animals are treated." William Wilberforce, the indefatigable and ultimately successful campaigner against the global slave trade in the early 19th century, was also a leader of the movement against cruelty to animals.

So, as we look forward to the Year of the Tiger, I hope we can make 2010 the year that we finally turn the tide in favor of the wild tiger, the year when we can bring together local, regional, and global action to reverse the decline of the wild tiger and help restore and stabilize what's a critical part of our heritage and biodiversity.

But we can only do it together. So, I want to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to come, to be part of this, and to spread the word about the commitment to this issue.

Thank you very much, Dr. Clough, for the invitation.