

Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Fifty years after it was founded, the World Wildlife Fund is now a familiar face for millions of men, women and children. A face symbolised in an everyday and almost affectionate way by the giant panda, which has become its signature.

But it would be inappropriate to forget that this Foundation, present throughout the world, relies first of all on those who have been running it day after day for a half century.

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Like all anniversaries, this is a moment of emotion and conviviality. And I would like to salute this conviviality by telling all of you what a pleasure it is for me to be with you here today.

But, like all anniversaries, this gathering is also a moment of reflection, an opportunity to look back, while anticipating the future.

This is why I would like to pay tribute to the WWF's essential role in environmental conservation, thereby recalling the influence the WWF has, and continues to have on those who, like me, have espoused the fight in defence of Nature, the Earth and Life itself.

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Fifty years ago, by proclaiming the need to respect our Planet, your organisation indeed contributed to a major shift: a gradual revelation of the extreme fragility of the world we live in.

This revelation came in a slow complex movement made up of objective tragedies and revolutionary ideas.

This movement finally managed to convince more and more people thanks to the courage of those who succeeded in making themselves heard - first, preaching in the wilderness, then to growing crowds.

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Among these voices, I would like to say here that the WWF has played a crucial part, and emphasise the effort undertaken from the start by your organisation to mobilise everyone, regardless of their resources, their situation or even their age.

While others preferred to support more targeted initiatives, the WWF had long since chosen to conduct awareness actions as broadly as possible.

These actions obviously contributed to the Fund's renown and success. Most of all, they fostered the success of our common combat.

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Despite serious warnings, our Planet is still alive. More important, thanks in particular to the WWF's initiatives and certain particularly dynamic institutions, it has become more alert. We must pay tribute to this advance, which is determinant in the future of our commitment.

As you know, I myself have resolved to dedicate much of my time and energy to the conservation of our Planet, its biodiversity and climate.

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I am firmly convinced, like all of you here today, that the long daunting combat to which we are all committed needs all available energy, talent and support. Thus, I place my action in the continuum of the WWF's pioneering work, one of the first to prove each individual's usefulness.

This is why I am so pleased with the fruitful partnerships between my Foundation and your organisation, as many of you well know.

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These partnerships bear on the conservation of bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean Sea, Siberian tigers in China, water in

the Himalayas, as well as the creation of protected marine areas and support for the Vintsy clubs in Madagascar that exemplify our common philosophy by raising awareness among people to what is at stake in sustainable development.

I believe that, through all these actions, we remain loyal to the spirit that brings us here together this evening: one that entails striving towards the development of knowledge, the accomplishment of effective action and people's commitment.

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Indeed, just as I observe at the UN and elsewhere the difficulty of convincing world leaders of the need for radical reforms, I can also measure the determinant contribution of all initiatives, often private, that prove genuine progress possible.

This is why I want to tell you how confident I am in the future.

Although the international context may seem stark, although many people today have other priorities than preserving the Earth that feeds them, I know that millions of men, women and children are now by our side, by your side, to address with you this great challenge for the future.

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Like you, they have adopted Bishop Desmond Tutu's wonderful words: "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

Together, bit by bit, side by side with all those who give life to the WWF and all those who support it, I know we can keep this Planet alive.

Thank you.