**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Youth Leaders/Civic Education Center, Zamalek**

**“Ecosystems at Risk: Safeguarding Egypt’s Biodiversity”**

The 21st Cairo Climate Talks and Forum France-Egypt “Ecosystems at Risk: Safeguarding Egypt’s Biodiversity” brought together experts from Egypt, Germany and France to highlight the ecological and economic importance of preserving our rich natural heritage, both in Egypt and abroad.

Home to one of the world’s most diverse ecosystems, the Red Sea, as well as being host to the second most important flyway for migratory birds, Egypt is a critical intersection for many birds, corals, marine and other wildlife. The implications of not only protecting these species, but also the natural habitats that draw them to the area are far reaching.

The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo, the Embassy of France in Cairo and the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs hosted this one-day expert’s workshop and public panel discussion to help identify the obstacles facing conservation, share local and international initiatives to protect wildlife and foster ecotourism, and raise awareness of biodiversity issues.

H.E. Michael Bock, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Arab Republic of Egypt and H.E. Nicolas Galey, Ambassador of France to the Republic of Egypt opened the interactive discussion.

“Scientists estimate that there are around 11 million species on earth but we only know 10% of them. In fact, science tells us that 30% of all species are likely to be extinct by 2050,” H.E. Bock said.

“I am aware that this is a very complex issue involving socio-economic and law enforcement aspects when people are hungry and police have something more important to do. But it is also about raising awareness and that is why we are here today. Let us all work together to safeguard the beautiful ecosystems of Egypt. To be successful, it must become a real concern of the Egyptian people, not only of some environmentalists. We stand ready to work with you not only on the issue of green tourism. Let us not forget: We cannot live without nature, but nature can live without us.”

H.E. Galey highlighted France’s support for regional biodiversity protection efforts and the importance of wildlife such as coral reefs to medical treatments and discoveries.

“We know that the biodiversity of coral reefs is already used in many drugs and treatments against cancer and AIDS. The first retroviral drug, the AZT, comes from a molecule secreted by a coral sponge,” he said.

“Questions of biodiversity involve developmental issues in Southern countries, the main suppliers of genetic resources. So we need to make sure that the economic use of this wealth respects local populations' rights, while interrogating each other on the conditions to patent live organisms and the application of intellectual property on genetic resources,” the French Ambassador added.

Preserving rich ecosystems is not a luxury, but an essential part of tourism, medical advances, food supply and other basic needs.

Put into real terms, the economic value of a species can be a persuasive tool in convincing decision makers to protect flora, fauna and their habitats, explained panelist Dr. Mahmoud Hanafy, Professor of Marine Biology at Suez Canal University. Hanafy who has played a critical role in the establishment, oversight and preservation of Red Sea protectorates, said that economic analyses suggest the value of a single dolphin, shark or dugong (sea cow) can reach into the millions of dollars over their lifetimes in terms of tourism revenue for Egypt.

However, such animals are at risk from rampant development, hunting and irresponsible tourism practices.

“Sadly when we speak about nature and conservation in Egypt we’re constantly viewed as speaking about luxuries, there are things with higher priorities … but we are still part of nature; we drink from it, breathe from it, and are protected by it,” said panellist Nour A. Nour, Executive Coordinator of the NGO Nature Conservation Egypt.

His organization is currently developing best practice guidelines for bird-friendly hotels, among other efforts to prevent the deaths of some of the millions of migratory birds who pass each year from Europe and West Asia through Egypt on the way to African wintering grounds and back. Egypt, Nour said is “essentially sitting on a gold mine” of a multi-billion-dollar global bird watching industry, but needs to protect and foster natural habitats and safe migratory paths for birds and get local communities on board to begin capturing more of this potential revenue.

Water bird expert and panellist Dr. Pierre Defos du Rau, Researcher at the French Governmental Agency for Wildlife and Hunting Management, spoke on the need to balance conservation efforts with the population’s use of hunting as an essential food source.

“Migratory birds are renewable resources as long as there is habitat to support them. But if the habitat is destroyed then the resource is not renewable. Ultimately the destruction or reclamation of natural habitat is a much bigger issue,” said Dr. Defos du Rau.

Whether in Egypt or Europe, an aware population that pushes policy-makers to act on environmental issues, coupled with sound scientific data on which to base decisions can galvanize governments and businesses into action, said Eng. Jan Paul Lindner, Environmental Engineer and Life Cycle Assessment Expert from Stuttgart University in Germany.

***The Cairo Climate Talks*** *are a series of monthly events meant to provide a platform to exchange experience, raise awareness and foster cooperation between policymakers, the business community, the scientific community as well as civil society. It is held in cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Egyptian German High Level Joint Committee for Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection (JCEE).*

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*In February 2013, the French Institute of Egypt launched the "****Forum France Egypt, the paths of transition****" as a platform for discussions and in-depth exchanges between French and Egyptian specialists to better understand the Egyptian political transition's impacts on various fields like governance, culture, research and history. Given the wide-ranging transition's impacts on the Egyptian society, the French Institute of Egypt, based on the richness of its areas of expertise, wished to contribute to the understanding of this process. The creation of the Forum Egypt France responds to this ambition. The debates target Egyptian youth in order to give voice to new generations and foster reflection on Egypt while it is reshaping itself.*

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