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For Immediate Release

**MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN HOSTS HISTORIC MEETING TO DISCUSS
ENDANGERED PLANT SPECIES IN THE CAUCASUS REGION**
Years of Political Unrest in the Caucasus Limited Coordinated Conservation Efforts

(ST. LOUIS): For the first time, **American** scientists and researchers from the **former Soviet Union** will gather in the United States to discuss a mutual concern: **how to protect Caucasian plant life**. Oct. 2 through 8, botanists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Turkey will meet at the **International Caucasian Symposium** at the Missouri Botanical Garden to discuss the creation of a Caucasian Plant Red List, a list of the most endangered plants in the Caucasus Mountains. The Symposium will eventually result in *The Plant Red Book*, the first publication by the six countries covering the Caucasus.

The Caucasus Mountains are situated between the Black Sea (Europe) and the Caspian Sea (Asia), and span six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia and Turkey. The vegetation in the Caucasus is remarkably diverse, ranging from alpine meadows and montane conifer forest to arid shrublands and semi-deserts. Of the 6,300 species of vascular plants, about 2,500 are endemic to the region.

Despite the botanical richness of the region, political unrest has prevented botanists and conservationists outside the former Soviet Union from working with the region's rare and endangered plants. Most information on the flora has been published only in Russian, of little help to scientists in countries outside the former Soviet Union. Further, with political tensions high, no country in the region was able to initiate a collaborative work covering the complete flora of the

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ADD ONE: Caucasus Symposium

region. Without a list of endangered plant species, there is no scientific basis for conservation.

“This Symposium is significant because it will give American specialists an opportunity to sit down, face-to-face, with Caucasian specialists and learn about the unique flora and vegetation of the region,” said Dr. Tatyana Shulkina, Missouri Botanical Garden associate curator, former Soviet Union (the Caucasus) projects and a native of Russia. “This will hopefully lead to the establishment of personal relationships and collaboration on future works of this biodiversity hot spot.”

Since 2003, the Missouri Botanical Garden has played a role in bringing scientists from the region together to discuss Caucasian plant life. With financial support diminishing, the Garden held a botanical conference in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. It was the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that botanists from Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia gathered to discuss ways to protect Caucasian plant life. Scientists have met twice since then.

During the meeting, a committee was formed to complete a Caucasian Plant Red List – a list of the most endangered plants – with the Garden’s Curator of the Herbarium, Dr. James Solomon as the editor. The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) funded the project.

One of the additional goals of this International Caucasian Symposium is to provide Caucasian plant specialists with the opportunity to learn about herbarium collection management and the many ways that collection data may be shared. The Missouri Botanical Garden’s herbarium, which contains more than six million specimens, is widely considered one of the best in the world. The techniques and procedures used at the Garden will be used as a model of how to utilize modern technology in the herbaria of their home country.

The International Caucasian Symposium will be open to the public on Oct. 7 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Monsanto Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden, located at 4500 Shaw Blvd at the intersection of Shaw and Vandeventer. Botanical specialists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Turkey will give an overview of the Caucasian flora and vegetation.

The Missouri Botanical Garden is the oldest continually operating botanical garden in the nation, celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2009. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.

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NOTE: Digital color images available by request. Download media materials at www.mobot.org/press.

The Missouri Botanical Garden’s mission is “to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment, in order to preserve and enrich life.” Today, 150 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.