

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of IUCN, I would like to welcome the successful outcome of the seventh replenishment of the GEF. It is successful because of the financing mobilized and maintained at a stable level, and I would like to congratulate all involved for your engagement and trust in the GEF partnership.

It is also successful in terms of the programme it proposes to finance as a result of the negotiations that happened over the past year and a half. There is indeed clear evidence that the threats to our global commons can only be addressed in an integrated and continued manner and I believe that the programme proposed for this replenishment can achieve this.

Before I explain why, I would like to take us a little bit back.

IUCN was created 70 years ago to first assess the status of nature and biodiversity and then tackle the challenges we face, drawing on its nearly 1,400 members and more than 10,000 commission experts. But, even with such a large membership and network of expertise in a vast array of disciplines it was an impossible task – we then saw communities of environmentalists, development workers, and the private sector, operating mostly in isolation of one another yet the work of each one of us affects the other. Over the years, our different communities have increasingly come together given the recognition of **how intertwined our economies are with the natural environment**; a recognition of how dependent we are on services from ecosystems – from our basic water supply, a healthy environment to live in, our food security to security in general.

Proposing solutions that enable us to continue to benefit from the goods and services that ecosystems provide is challenging in the sense that it brings many stakeholders to the table, each with different perspectives and objectives. But the past couple of years have demonstrated that there is **growing momentum on solutions that can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits in tandem** – the essence of the ***Sustainable Development Goals*** in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that the international community subscribed to in 2015.

**One of our biggest challenges to delivering economic, social and environmental benefits lies in the agriculture sector.** Our demand for food is currently among the top drivers of biodiversity loss, land degradation and depletion of water supplies. Yet, we need to continue feeding a growing world population. We must find ways to transform this sector at a scale that protects our security of food and water supplies, making it more efficient and productive while reducing the expansion into forests in particular, so that we do not lose services from neighbouring ecosystems.

To do this we have to **transform markets at a scale** that we have not done before; we need to work across entire landscapes; we need to bring in key players from the **private sector and from those in key value chains in the finance, banking and insurance sectors. We need to show them they stand to benefit as well.** The

**GEF's sustainable food systems impact programme is thus key** in bringing this opportunity, along with the GEF's emphasis on **blue economy** opportunities, while at the same time also concentrating on important areas for forests – from the Amazon Basin, the Congo Basin, to important forests in drylands that our societies depend upon.

Because of its tradition of working at entire landscapes level, IUCN is looking forward to joining forces with other partners to deliver on these critical impact programmes.

**Urbanization** is another important driving force for environmental change. The urban population is expected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050, by which time the world's cities will be generating **75 per cent of global waste and greenhouse gas emissions**. But a more spatially concentrated population also provides a **strategic opportunity to improve environmental sustainability, as more people can be more easily reached**. With the growing health costs to countries from air and water pollution, the GEF's cities impact programme provides another important opportunity to tackle economic growth, environment and social sustainability in tandem—**from resource efficiency to nature based solutions that enhance cities' resilience and protect infrastructure, to simply 'green spaces'** for our children to grow up in a healthy and pleasant urban environment.

Now is an important turning point in which we need to **ensure that critical ecosystem services which sustain fundamental human rights** are sustainably safeguarded and contribute to building peace rather than increasing the **risk of conflict**, thus affecting **security in general**. Given the threat of climate change and the risk and impact of disasters associated with it, this new phase of the GEF will be an opportunity to tackle these growing challenges while at the same time offering opportunities at scale that can **transform markets**, transform lives, and operate in a world where resources from the **private sector can be leveraged to secure niches in new innovations that will enhance delivering on global environmental benefits – the core mission of the GEF**.

Thank you.