

**African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity**

**Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt  
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**Remarks by Naoko Ishii  
CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Excellency, Yasmin Foad, Minister of Environment of Egypt  
Honorable Ministers,  
Colleagues and friends

First, I want to congratulate the leadership provided by Minister Foad and the Government of Egypt for hosting this important Summit, and to the Ministers from Africa gathered here today.

We are at a critical juncture for the future of our planet and its people. The latest Living Planet index has shown we lost biodiversity by 60% since 1970.

And, earlier this year scientists warned us that we are leaving a stable relationship between Earth systems and humans, and moving to hothouse earth, where conditions for prosperity will be endangered with much higher temperatures and sea level rise, and diminished ecosystem services.

**The message from science is clear:** We are on collision course with nature!

We humans have become the dominant economic force and are pushing Earth to a breaking point. Now is the time to change human behavior once and for all. What we need is **transformation of economic systems** so that humans can continue to prosper in harmony with nature. Patrizia mentioned the recent IPCC report. It's clear that we need transformation to keep to 1.5 degrees C.

The challenge of transformation is most acute in Africa. Africa is the fastest growing continent, with a population much younger. How to feed the people where food demand is projected to increase by 300% but with productivity

remaining the lowest inent. And, Africa has to start this journey still facing basic development needs. But the challenge also comes with opportunities.

Your Excellencies, what future Africa wants critically hinges on how you best use its natural assets and rich ecosystems, whose full potential is yet to be tapped. This Summit provides us with a remarkable opportunity to think through this agenda together.

The recent IPBES report provides valuable scenarios and options for the way ahead. Importantly, the report is clear that the major driver of biodiversity loss in Africa is conversion of natural habitats into agriculture and human settlements, which will worsen the situation if left unchecked.

This is fairly consistent with the assessment of progress toward meeting the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

While we are on track to achieve protected areas for terrestrial and inland water areas, we are losing badly in arresting economic forces from food and land use systems.

With those sobering data, it is time to recognize that the current approach is not good enough to safeguard biodiversity. We must do so more directly and comprehensively to address the drivers of biodiversity loss. We must do this recognizing the how to rebuild our relationship with the Earth system.

I am extremely encouraged to see the **Proposed Pan-African Action Agenda** addressing those challenges front on and proposing to bring diverse sectors including agriculture, mining and manufacturing into a coordinated action plan. That is the key to trigger systems change.

The Global Environment Facility, or G.E.F. has reoriented our strategy for the next four years to catalyze transformational change in key economic systems.

The single largest investment program in the GEF-7 cycle is on the **Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Program**, through which we have allocated \$1/2 a billion dollars to be invested in the transformation of food systems, particularly those with the largest footprint on biodiversity globally.

Our strategy has been stimulated by the emergence of powerful new coalitions, such as the Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 (TFA2020), the Food and Land Use

Coalition (FOLU), the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR), and many others, with whom we are articulating ways to bring about transformative change.

We also propose a Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program, focusing on the Congo Basin, where it was just reported that small-scale forest clearing for agriculture was the largest direct driver of forest loss in the region, contributing about 84% of the total 16.6 million hectares lost between 2000 to 2014. We will also focus on drylands to build on what we have already done together under the Great Green Wall Initiative and other programs.

These programs are expected to produce multiple benefits across the **three Rio Conventions**, and we will work closely together with the Executive Secretaries, Christiana, Monique and Patricia, who are here together with me.

Your excellencies, colleagues

We must start building a new movement – which some are calling “**A New Deal for Nature**” - that safeguards our global commons.

Time is ripe for a New Deal for Nature. Not only like-minded groups of conservationists, but much broader groups, including governments, businesses, CSOs, academia, and most importantly, citizens, woke up to the challenges we are facing, and are actively looking for solutions, and have started to act on it. We at the GEF are truly excited to be a part of this movement.

Year 2020 offers one last opportunity for the global community to get its act together – let’s not miss it!

We can only do this together. Thank you.