

## **Opening Remarks – Expanded Constituency Workshop (ECW)**

**Trinidad & Tobago, March 2, 2016**

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Good morning and welcome to all. On behalf of GEF CEO Naoko Ishii, I want to thank you all very much for coming to this meeting.

We have many countries represented here today, and we greatly appreciate your participation. The GEF also wishes to extend our special thanks to the Government of Trinidad & Tobago for hosting this meeting and for inviting us, and for your wonderful and gracious hospitality. It is an honor to be here with your Honorable Deputy Permanent Secretary Beverly Khan, and with all of our distinguished participants, including GEF agencies and members of civil society.

We have much to discuss in these next two days. One of our goals is to provide an update on the work of the GEF, based on our new GEF 2020 strategy and our programming and policy priorities. There is a lot going on at the GEF, and we hope we can provide a useful review of this - - and hear your ideas and feedback as well!

Our second goal is to discuss the status and possibilities for projects and activities in your countries, with support from the GEF. We want to do the best we can to support your needs and interests. We also want to share ideas and practical ways on how you can access GEF resources and expertise, and on designing and managing projects supported by GEF.

As my colleague William will explain shortly, we have developed a new format for this Workshop to achieve these goals. Our intent is to spend less time on the history and foundations of the GEF, and more time to take a deep dive into a few key areas of our work. In addition, we have something in store for tomorrow and Friday – first in the hotel and then out in the field -

that we hope will strengthen capacity within your governments to select, design and manage GEF-funded projects. We're sure we will learn a lot too.

Let me begin with a couple of highlights of what's happening at the GEF. We are now into Year Two of the current GEF replenishment period (GEF-6), with a successful pledge of 30 donor countries of US\$ 4.43 billion dollars to support developing countries' efforts over these four years to prevent degradation of the global environment.

We are very grateful for the trust and confidence in the GEF's work, and for the strong partnership that we have together in this work. We are making steady progress in developing projects and programs to utilize these resources, in close cooperation with you. We are here to continue this work and dialogue. We want to make sure that we fully understand and focus on the critical and priority issues you face, and the best opportunities to tackle those issues.

There are also some important new developments in the landscape of this work which guide our efforts. The climate change meetings in Paris provide a strengthened mandate and urgent responsibility, highlighting the special and critical risks and needs facing small island developing states. We have a bright lamppost of where we need to go, and enhanced means and commitments to do so. But this must be acted upon, urgently.

We participated actively as an observer in these Paris discussions, and have been in close contact with the new Green Climate Fund to provide the benefit of GEF's experience and help in its effective creation. I would like to highlight this point: it is critical to have additional resources to tackle the climate change challenge, and there are enormous and urgent opportunities for complementary work between the GEF and the GCF to make this happen.

Beyond this world of climate change, the GEF also engaged as observer to support the negotiation of the new Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 Development Agenda. We wish to recognize and highlight the leadership role played by SIDS in ensuring that climate

change and oceans, in particular, would be core elements of this agenda. We want to be an energetic force, in partnership with you, to support and catalyze actions for their implementation.

Thirdly, our new GEF 2020 Strategy, endorsed by GEF Council, provides a key foundation for our work. It commits the GEF partnership to put greater priority on tackling the fundamental drivers of environmental degradation, and to support innovative solutions for greater results. The Strategy also emphasizes GEF's role in supporting integrated solutions for the global environment. Many global environmental problems are inter-related, and GEF's mandate to work across these issues - -on climate change, biodiversity, desertification, dangerous chemicals, international waters and forests - - gives us a unique opportunity to support integrated solutions that tackle more than one problem at a time, and make best use of the limited resources.

Given this mandate for action, let me note a couple of specific priority topics that we would like to discuss this week. The first is a new effort we are making to gather and utilize our collective knowledge to develop better and more effective interventions to fight global environmental problems. We call this “knowledge management.” We want to have the best (and worst) lessons of our experience at our fingertips as we move forward, so we can be faster, stronger and better in getting the urgently needed results, and in helping to shape the policy dialogue.

The second is that we are re-energizing our commitments to engage with all stakeholders in this work, building on a new set of Guidelines to implement the GEF's Public Involvement Policy. This commitment is directly embedded in the “Charter” of the GEF (the GEF Instrument), and is part of our DNA. We know that it helps make better projects, and builds broader ownership in our work. We know that local people and communities, including indigenous peoples, have expertise and interests which are critical to the success of our efforts. We know that gender equality is crucial to our efforts, and that women in myriad ways play a fundamental role in actions to protect the global environment, support and fulfill livelihoods, and

give us a sustainable planet. And we know also that this meaningful and full engagement is a matter of respecting peoples' rights. So we will be coming back to this topic too in the days.

And third, we want to be able to discuss and review GEF-supported project and program activities and opportunities in your countries, both in our general sessions and on the sidelines. There are many major GEF-supported projects in the region - - on marine protection, wastewater treatment, renewable energy, adaptation to climate change, and more. But there also remain significant GEF resources for these next two years that have not yet been utilized. During these two days, our team will share the efforts that we are making to work on the critical challenges that your countries and people face, and we want to hear from you about how you see it – your ideas, recommendations, and any criticisms too - - about what more can and should be done. We have a large team here with lead experts from our programming office who look forward very much to this dialogue

When we arrived yesterday we could see and feel immediately how beautiful it is here. We witnessed the spectacular flights of the scarlet ibis in the nearby Caroni swamp and wetlands, maybe thousands of them, in the late afternoon sky; the beauty and fantastic biodiversity of the nearby mountainous forests and wildlife; and the joy on the face of schoolchildren talking about their land (while taking a few minutes away from their regular schoolwork!). And we've greatly appreciated the hospitality and warmth of the people.

But we also sense something else - - the energy, the commitment, the insistence on action. We want to continue to work with you, all of your countries and peoples, on the complicated sustainable development issues which you may face. And we want hear and learn from you your ideas on how, now and in future cycles of the GEF, we can improve and serve you in a better way.

Thank you again for being here. We look forward to an active and productive session over the next two days.