

Speech for 5<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly, Cancun, Mexico May 28-29, 2014

Mr. Atiqullah Atifmal, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Distinguished Chair,

Your Excellencies, Ministers and Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to address this important gathering of the GEF 5th Assembly on behalf of our Constituency comprised of Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

On behalf of our Constituency, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the United States of Mexico for hosting GEF 5th Assembly. Our sincere appreciation for the extraordinary hospitality, and all the wonderful arrangements in this beautiful place which will make our meetings successful one.

Distinguished Delegates,

Climate change is not only a challenge to one country or a region. It is a global challenge to all of us in this 21st century, exacerbated by increases in global population, environmental degradation and intensified poverty.

We believe that climate change is not only a scientific challenge but it definitely involves economics, social and health issues as well. Therefore, from this podium we would like to call on the United Nations family and all other development partners and world organizations involved in

different areas of our environment to commit whatever available resources they could mobilize to address the various challenges posed by climate change, biodiversity, deforestation, desertification and land degradation.

Distinguished Delegates,

Our Constituency is facing many challenges such as land degradation, desertification, and deforestation. These three major challenges are very dangerous to fertile land which will negatively impact the benefits which people could derive from its use. In this regard, we call upon GEF and other organizations to step forward and commit more resources to meet these important challenges in a more sustainable manner. We would also caution the conventions, organizations and development agencies involved in environmental issues that if rapid and appropriate measures are not taken by GEF and other development partners to assist these countries, the impact of the land degradation, desertification and deforestation will intensify and will be difficult to mitigate the associated risks to the above areas.

We would like to highlight the statement in the GEF 2020 vision with regard to land degradation affecting several large regions in the world, where 24 percent of the total land has been degraded affecting about 1.1 billion people with impact disproportionately affecting women who are generally heads of the household in rural areas. Land degradation and desertification severely impact our national efforts to achieve growth, thus contributing to lowering standards of living of our population and intensifying poverty.

In this regard, we call on GEF to explore new and innovative financing mechanisms and instruments to enhance GEF financial resources and give

our affected countries due attention and support for their national efforts to combat desertification, and improve livelihood of, particularly, the rural poor.

Finally, please allow me Mr./Madam Chair, to once again reiterate that it is always at the best interest of all the Donors and Member countries to act as swiftly as to help the countries meet the environmental challenges in a more sustainable manner. We believe early actions would lessen the burden and help us with cleaner environment, reduced pollution, stronger economies and healthier societies.

Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing and once again, on behalf of our Constituency comprised of seven countries, I would like to once again thank the host Government for the hospitality and excellent arrangements and look forward for very successful Assembly Meeting.

Thank you!