

In the name of god, the merciful, the compassionate.

Distinguished Chair,

Your Excellencies, Ministers and Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and privilege to address this gathering of the 6th GEF Assembly on behalf of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for hosting this Assembly, and for their kind hospitality that has been amply demonstrated to all delegations and participants.

Distinguished Delegates,

In common with all 183 Member Countries present here today, Afghanistan is facing an extensive range of environmental threats, which is interrelated and complex, which requires careful understanding or characterization to find the possible solutions. Uncertainties are created for planning and developing strategies if the root causes of the threats are not addressed. For example, although not often recognised by non-specialists, what we perceive as individual environmental problems such as flooding or drought, are actually made up a complex mix of contributing problems each of which is constantly changing and interacting with other problems leading to unpredictable results. At the heart of the difficulties in dealing with environmental problems then are the uncertainties that result from how these contributing problems interact. This makes understanding the way that humans and nature interact, very complex. The need to understand these complex interactions is one of the core ideas underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

What we do know is that the scope and scale of the impacts of human activities on the environment are unprecedented, with a very real risk of potentially irreversible global environmental change. At this forum, all the parties present are already well aware of how ecosystem degradation is impacting on human lives and livelihoods and how this is exacerbating the prevailing conditions of poverty, food insecurity, and conflict. The toll that pollution, waste and hazardous chemicals is having on the health of both humans and ecosystems is self-evident and well-documented.

By way of illustration, Afghanistan is currently in the grips of a drought that is affecting large parts of the country, and is expected to lead to severe food shortages for more than two million Afghans. It is thus self-evident that environmental challenges such as those I have already outlined undermine the ability of Afghan citizens, and indeed citizens of the world, to achieve human goals of welfare, well-being and happiness. In our specific case, pressures such as poverty, land degradation,

drought, desertification, deforestation, water scarcity and air pollution are also compounded by 40 years of instability and conflict. One result of this is increasing rural-to-urban migration, often with negative socio-economic consequences. Moreover, the impact of many of these challenges is only likely to intensify, and will disproportionately affect vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and displaced peoples.

Distinguished Delegates,

Despite how overwhelmingly negative this picture may seem, we do not believe that efforts to address these issues are futile. Indeed, we are gathered here at this 6th GEF Assembly precisely to celebrate the achievements made by the global community over more than two and a half decades to address environmental challenges, as well as to discuss how Member Countries, Implementing Partners and the GEF can best collaborate for delivering transformational change.

In particular, we recognise the potential of bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and the as yet largely untapped pool of indigenous knowledge to help design sustainable solutions to address the various challenges posed by climate change. The main technical challenge then will be to provide local communities with the means to evaluate and respond to environmental change through better decision-making and access to information. A *shared-learning* approach will be needed if we are to gain a better understanding of the likely consequences of human interactions with ecosystems and the social norms that drive decision-making processes. This improved understanding will be the foundation for better decision-making that effectively reduces environmental risks and the level of environmental degradation. Ultimately, the goal should be to develop what might be called a “social-ecological” approach to designing, implementing and monitoring interventions that aim to reduce the rate of environmental degradation and reduce the exposure of communities to the associated environmental risks. This also calls for the deepening of the participation of the citizens in all phases of environmental and climate action, for sustainability of intervention and ownership of results.

As we consider the success of the GEF-7 replenishment, and the promise that it holds for supporting early and effective action on global environmental change, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan wishes to reiterate its support for the GEF’s programme of work, exploring new and innovative financial mechanisms and instruments whereby multilateral support can deliver global environmental benefits in affected countries. Only through enhanced action such as green financing, promotion of renewable energy, and technology transfer will we, as a global partnership of Member Countries and Implementing Partners supported by the GEF, be able to catalyse a transition to a cleaner and greener environment. We firmly believe that safe-guarding of our natural heritage in the form of functional and biodiverse

ecosystems will lead to stronger economies, healthier societies and improved livelihoods, particularly for the rural poor.

Honourable Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, on behalf of Afghanistan, I would like to once again thank the host Government for their hospitality and excellent arrangements. We thank all delegations representing Member Countries, Implementing Partners, Civil Society, Indigenous Peoples, Multilateral Environmental Conventions, academia and the private sector for their valuable inputs. And we look forward with anticipation to the successful conclusion of this 6th GEF Assembly, including robust and insightful discussions during the course of the various Round Tables as well as the STAP, GEF Council and LDCF/SCCF Council Meetings, and a renewed commitment for collaborative action on global environmental change.

Dere Menene! (Thank you!)