

6th Assembly of the Global Environment Facility

Statement from Ms. Ornela Çuçi, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment of the Republic of Albania.

Distinguished Ms. Naoko Ishii,

Excellencies, Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today and to address this Assembly of the Global Environment Facility.

On behalf of the Government of Albania, I would like to thank the Government of Viet Nam and the city of Da Nang for hosting us to this great event.

I would also like to congratulate **Ms. Naoko Ishii** and every member of the Council of the GEF for their leadership to a successful replenishment of the GEF and special thanks go to all the donor countries that made this replenishment possible.

Albania has benefited from GEF resources since in its early days of operation. Thanks to GEF resources channelled through over 50 projects and the support of its Implementing Agencies such as UNDP and UNEP, Albania has put systems in place to protecting its unique biodiversity, reporting to different conventions such as UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD and

implementing priority measures deriving from the commitments under these conventions.

GEF resources have contributed towards expansions of protected areas which today account for 16% of the territory, transforming the market for Solar Water Heaters, sustaining livelihoods of vulnerable communities living by river deltas and protecting lakes, rivers and wetlands.

Despite of such progress, the status of environment in Albania is far from where it should be. As a country with economy in transition, a significant amount of natural resources of Albania have been compromised and used unsustainably. Efforts are put in place to reverse this trend. In this regard, I am very pleased to inform you today that the Government of Albania has made Environment a key priority and has shared a vision for “***A clean, green, healthy and close- to- people Environment***”.

What does this mean for Albania’s people?

For the first time, the Government of Albania is considering environmental protection as an emergency issue, for which we have engaged even the army to help in cleaning rivers, illegal dumpsites and protected areas. Under this environmental emergency, the Albanian government has undertaken drastic measures, such as banning hunting, moratorium of tree cutting, or banning the use of plastic bags, with a lot more of other drastic measures being under discussion. We are taking into full consideration social and economic impacts of our measures as we are using the golden model of engaging with academia and researchers, business and government at both levels, local and

central. Through different campaigns and education channels we are bringing environment very close to people's hearts and have them lead our battles with pollution. We are revising and strengthening environmental protection curricula in our middle and high school systems. We are very optimistic in achieving our goals because we have the support of and working closely with the young population who are better educated on environmental issues so that can embrace the change easier and faster.

We are sharing our experience and taking a leadership role in the region through regional projects and initiatives developed and implemented with our neighbors, with whom we share one third of all species of worldwide flora and fauna. Albania has initiated a regional campaign for protection of Adriatic Sea from Marine debris and promotion of sustainable tourism, between Albania, Croatia and Montenegro, since February 2018.

On that regard, the work of the Ministry of Environment has become a perpetuum of 365/365, 7/7, to have a clean and green environment.

Albania has been one of the first countries in the region and within the GEF constituency that has ratified the Paris Agreement (21 September 2016). Albania's Nationally Determined Contribution commits to reduce CO₂ emissions in the period 2016–2030 by 11.5 % compared with the baseline scenario.

Albania stands ready to advance global agenda through local/country actions by scaling up important reforms in the country in the area such as the ones related to Clean and Green Albania 2020 that have in focus sustainable

urban systems and promotion of sustainable tourism. We are working hard to make efficient our last campaign “Clean and Green”, with clean up days, monitoring the services quality and implement the “polluter pays” principle.

I shared these information with you to point out that if there is a political will to shift the attention to the environment, it can go as far as making it a goal to be achieved

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

We have ambitious plans but insufficient resources. The GEF support is crucial for Albania, and we believe that with the effective and smart programming of the country allocation we would be able to leverage the environmental finance needed to achieve our ambitious plans. We strongly believe in catalyzing and transformational power of the GEF resources and look forward to an effective use of GEF7 resources to paradigm shifting of sustainable use of resources, reducing wastes and transiting to low emission and resilient development.

Lastly, allow me, to thank the GEF and its Implementing Agencies again for all the assistance given so far.

I would also like to thank every participant to this Assembly that is devoted to protecting our environment.