Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends, good morning to all of you.

It is a great pleasure for me to be back at the Africa Ministerial Conference on Environment meeting (AMCEN).

It was the Bamako meeting in 2010 when I attended AMCEN for the first time and I was with the Japanese Government. After I joined the GEF in 2012, I was a regular visitor to AMCEN, including Arusha, Cairo and Libreville.

Looking back over the last decade in my own eyes, I would say AMCEN has made a significant journey, which is mirrored in the changes in the global discourse. And most importantly, I clearly see Africa has started to play a much more active role in shaping the global agenda. Examples of course include the
Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement to combat climate change.

I want to highlight four areas which, in my view, illustrate cases where AMCEN has been taking a much more active role over the past decade.

First, environment has finally been shifting from being an obstacle to development to a driving force for development.

Being severely affected by climate change and environmental degradation, many countries in Africa are integrating sustainability thinking into their development activities. Strong calls for resilience is also brought by the African continent together with SIDS to the global discourse.

Second, there has been a growing focus on how to protect, manage and invest in natural capital.

Africa recognizes the role of natural capital through its own experiences, and what it means to rural community livelihoods, food security and social stability. Africa is well placed to forge a
pathway that will meet the sharp increase in demand for food without compromising the natural capital and vital ecosystem services, which are in turn the basis for future development.

Third, transformation to key economic systems is required for sustainable development, and multi-stakeholder coalitions are being formulated.

We have all come to understand that sustainable development cannot be achieved without changing our key economic systems, our energy system, food and land use, and cities. The food system for instance presents an acute challenge to Africa, as there is a need to feed the fast-growing population without degrading ecosystems. Those fundamental shifts in economic systems require a whole of government approach, which goes beyond environment ministers, and also needs to involve the private sector and CSOs, or nonstate actors.

The good news is that a number of multi-stakeholder coalitions have emerged in the African continent to address the challenge, be it the Food and Land Use Coalition, AR1000, Cocoa and Forest initiative, Africa palm oil collation, to just name a few.
Fourth, there is growing interest across the continent to make business more circular.

Indeed, the African continent is leading the way by launching several initiatives, one of them, the Africa Alliance on Circular Economy Charter is signed this afternoon, I understand.

Excellencies

As we have just seen, AMCEN has become an influencer to the global policy discourse. And I am proud that we are part of this community.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge much progress still needs to be made in terms of implementation.

In the next few minutes I would like to share with you what kind of help the GEF can offer to make implementation progress.

Since I joined the GEF in 2012, our strategy also has evolved to respond to the global policy discourse. We have made
integration and transformation more central to the GEF strategy.

Let us start with the food system. We launched in 2015 the program on *Food security in Africa* to invest in integrated practices that will not only increase food security for millions of smallholder farm households but ensure long-term sustainability and resilience of the production systems across 12 countries in the dryland regions in Africa.

This leads to another program, launched in 2019, *Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration*. At its core is the need for comprehensive land use planning to align priorities for development needs while protecting the natural environment and associated ecosystem services. The first batch of 18 countries approved under this program includes six countries from the Africa region (Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia and Tanzania), focusing on transforming the cocoa, coffee, oil palm and rice systems. One of the challenges in design and implementation is to bring not only environment ministers but also agriculture ministers on board.
The Africa region is also part of a global program on *Commodity Supply Chains*. Oil Palm is a priority commodity here in Africa, where several countries such as Liberia are already emerging as “frontiers” of expansion.

In terms of managing ecosystems and natural capital, I want to highlight three programs we are working on.

First, Africa is part of the *Global Wildlife Program* which we have launched to reverse the decline in wildlife populations due to illegal trade and trafficking. This program is particularly unique because it engages 13 countries globally, including six in Africa (Angola, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Namibia and South Africa), and integrates solutions along the entire supply chain.

Second is the *Congo Basin Landscapes Program*, which will engage all basin countries to advance an integrated and system-wide coordinated approach to safeguarding this globally important ecosystem.
Third is the *Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Program*. The targeted regions include the Miombo and Mopane ecosystems of southern Africa and the savannas of West Africa, with eight participating countries: Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe.

I also want to mention that there is renewed interest in the *Great Green Wall Initiative*, which is built on the first phase of investment since 2007.

We launched a global program on *Sustainable Cities*. Five cities from across Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal and South Africa are already participating in the program, and we hope to add many more during this current GEF funding cycle.

Lastly but not the least, I admire African countries taking the lead in the *circular economy*. GEF has extended projects such as e-waste in Nigeria and marine plastics in Ghana.

These are all ambitious programs and require broad coordination with the whole government, private sector and CSOs. In designing programs, we need to think through how we can tap
the potential of the growing youth population and digital technology. And we at the GEF will be here to support your efforts.

This will be my last AMacen as head of the GEF. I’ve been fortunate to witness African leaders standing tall in demonstrating their commitment to a bright future for this continent.

Thank you.