Breakfast with SPREP and Pacific Ministers

Remarks

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The Global Environment Facility

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Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Thank you very much for your warm welcome. I am honored and very pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you, Dear Ministers and Head of Delegations, of the instrumental Pacific Islands Countries Constituency. Indeed, I would like to emphasize from the start the importance of the strong relationship between the Pacific Islands and the Global Environment Facility. This can be seen in the robust GEF portfolio addressing the priorities of your countries. In my former capacity as Deputy Finance Minister of Finance for Japan, I had the opportunity to meet, and work closely with you. Now, as CEO of the GEF, I intend to continue and strengthen these relationships. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, and especially to David Sheppard and his staff for co-hosting this meeting.

I am aware of the uniqueness of each country’s characteristics, cultures, and issues. As a Pacific Islander myself, I know well the common challenges that the Pacific islands face. These include energy, food, and water security; invasive species; rising sea levels; reduction in marine biodiversity and productivity; the loss of coral reefs; and the need for renewable energy and adaptation to climate change. Some islands have lost a considerable amount of forest cover. This leads to soil erosion and, hence, lower crop yields and reduced water catchment.

Fish play a vital role in food security and economic development in the Pacific. For many countries in the Pacific region there is widening gap between the quantity of fish needed to provide food security and the quantity available from coastal fisheries.
I want to commend you for the recent Pacific Islands Leaders Forum held in Cook Islands entitled, “Large Ocean Island States – the Pacific Challenge.” Your have shown great initiative and leadership in emphasizing that the Pacific is an ocean of opportunity and that capitalizing on its potential is crucial both for the livelihoods of Pacific Island people and the future of the Pacific. Your initiative has inspired me in the development of the vision statement that will guide me in my stewardship of the GEF.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Worldwide, the coming decade presents unprecedented global environmental challenges. The carrying capacity of several of the earth’s ecosystems has already been reached or exceeded. In the next ten years, the world population will likely increase by 700 million; the population of middle-class consumers is expected to increase by more than 1 billion; and economic output is expected to grow by 50%. And yet, at this very moment, more than 900 million people do not have electricity and 1.2 billion lack access to safe water.

The challenges facing the Pacific Islands are no less pressing. In the Cook Islands conference, Pacific Islands Leaders emphasized the importance of developing national and regional strategies that reflect the opportunities and values of the ocean.
The fourteen Pacific island developing countries are home to over 9 million people speaking about 1,200 languages, and the majority of Pacific islanders live in rural areas. They reside on some 1,000 islands covering a land area of just over half a million square kilometers – about the size of Spain. The ecosystems supported across these islands are unique and among the most fragile and endangered in the world, most notably the great coral reefs. These are among the smallest and most remote countries on earth, much more vulnerable to extreme weather events and climate variability than most countries. These challenges require innovative approaches and tailored solutions to the complex combination of geographical and socioeconomic constraints of an individual island.

Under such pressures, incremental environmental improvement will not suffice. We need a transformational change in the management of the global environment.

What do I mean by transformational change? We must strive for the world where, first of all, the vital linkage between environment and sustainable development is clear to all. The Pacific Islands have already made significant progress in that regard, as most recently demonstrated through the 43rd Pacific Islands Leaders' Forum.

Second, the value of natural capital needs to be fully incorporated in the way decisions are made and progress is measured.

Third, all governments need to embed natural resource constraints into their national development plans; again an area where Pacific Islands have made some
progress which now needs to be enhanced, especially in the tourism and fisheries sectors.

Finally, all key actors – from local communities to national governments, the private sector, civil society organizations and indigenous peoples – need to recognize the part they must play in finding and implementing solutions.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

My vision is to make the GEF play a key part of the collective leadership we need to bring about this transformational change. The GEF should play four key roles. The GEF should be an innovator of new ideas and way of doing business. Second, the GEF should be a champion of global commons. Third, I want the GEF to be a partner of choice for the global environment. Lastly the GEF should serve as a financial catalyst, not just granting money for projects, but generating greater involvement by other institutions, as well as the private sector, in support of the global environment. I look forward to working with you to realize this goal. I have one objective in mind: to serve you better, for now and for the future of your children and the children of your children.

Pacific Islands are leading the way in marine protected areas and sustainable fisheries management. The Nauru agreement already serves as model. The Cook Islands Marine Park, launched at the recent forum, covers 1.1 million square kilometers, and Kiribati’s (Pronounced “Kiri-BAS”) Phoenix Islands Protected Area, covering 408,250 square kilometers, are not only the two largest marine
protected areas in developing countries but rival three of the largest MPAs in the world, one off Alaska and the others off Australian and New Caledonia. Now is the time to scale-up implementation and financial sustainability of these endeavors as well as increasing the participation of the private sector towards sustainable development of the marine space using the precautionary principle while ensuring conservation of essential biodiversity for the future.

The Pacific Islands Ridge to Reef National Priorities Program is an example of how our goal to scale up can apply to the Pacific region. I am pleased that as of September 2012, all the countries that have not yet used their STAR allocations have expressed interest in joining the program and that the majority has already sent letter of endorsements.

As of this past summer, it was expected that this program would be submitted to GEF Council in the November Work Program. Unfortunately, this proved to be too ambitious since more time was needed to enable countries to consult within their national constituencies. However, I am fully committed to no further delays and submitting the Pacific Islands National Priorities Ridge to Reef Program to GEF Council in the following work program.

I thank you for your attention.