

59th GEF Council Meeting

Opening Remarks

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

December 7, 2020

- Good morning colleagues and friends
- Welcome the 59th GEF Council Meeting.
- It's a great pleasure and honor to be here with you today albeit virtually
- I first want to extend my best wishes to you, your families and colleagues and hope everyone is safe and healthy in these extraordinary times
- We are meeting online today, but I know everybody across the GEF partnership is working harder than ever on our shared mission to protect the global environment.
- The past year indeed has been marked by bleak news for the global environment, intensifying public interest in climate change, ocean health, plastic waste, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Important and alarming research has underlined the scale of the future threat.
- These overlapping crises are not just a hallmark of a bad year. They reflect the human-caused environmental damage that will keep compounding in the epoch dubbed the Anthropocene, where humanity's impact on the planet dominates all else.
- At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed jobs, health, and short-term economic remedies to the top of government agendas, and possibly ahead of environmental commitments.
- As a former Minister I realize the immense pressure on politicians and institutions to respond to public demands for urgent short-term economic needs.
- Yet, while governments everywhere will continue to pour trillions of dollars into initiatives to help their economies recover from the impact of COVID-19, we must recognize that this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to up-scale support for critically needed solutions to help our forests, lands, and oceans sequester carbon and protect habitats.
- The GEF, and other multilateral environmental organizations have an important role to play in this regard.

- Friends and colleagues,
- Over the last 3 months I've had the chance to talk with many of you, to listen and learn about the challenges and opportunities before us.
- As most of you know, I'm not new to the GEF. As a recipient government, NGO and academic, I've been involved with this great organization since it was born 30 years ago!
- But, the last three months have been a very steep learning curve for me. What I've heard from talking to governments, agencies, NGOs, STAP, IEO, and the dedicated GEF staff is that our job is more important now than ever!
- Without a healthy environment, there cannot be human health or social progress. Nobody can prosper on a sick planet.
- The pandemic has been a stark reminder that the world was on the wrong track, with nature and economic systems in conflict.
- At the GEF, we are innovating to support a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The world has the tools to secure a sustainable future, including through the repurposing of "business-as-usual" incentives into positive ones. National policies and resources can go a long way to healing the global environment.
- We are focused on helping countries find ways to break down institutional silos, improve and enhance national policies and legal frameworks, encourage cooperation between ministerial portfolios, and support regional cooperation.
- We know from experience that well-designed policy drives private sector investment, as do solid legal and institutional frameworks.
- We have a very busy few days ahead of us. We will be looking at issues around the GEF's operations and effectiveness, and receiving reports from the Trustee, STAP and the IEO.
- We will be reviewing GEF's new private sector engagement strategy, as we seek to open-up avenues for investors and the financial community to support nature at scale,
- Building on the rich CSO consultation meeting that took place last Friday, we will have before us a progress report on enhancing CSO engagement with the GEF.
- There will also be an important dialogue with our colleagues in the multi-lateral environment conventions that the GEF serves.

- We are working to support ambitious outcomes from international negotiations next year on biodiversity to protect 30 percent of the planet by 2030, climate change to keep temperature rises below 1.5 degrees, and equally bold targets for land-use and chemicals.
- And, of course, you will be considering a new Work Program, one that is designed to both deliver substantial global environmental benefits, but also factors into the GEF partnership's proactive response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Since the start of the pandemic, the GEF has been taking actions to provide the flexibility needed to prepare quality projects in these extraordinary circumstances.
- On the programming front, the GEF is applying a green COVID-19 response lens to all new projects and programs, and those under preparation.
- We're making available additional support at the global or country level for specific actions to support an environmentally sustainable pandemic response.
- These actions are being informed by a GEF COVID-19 Task Force of experts that is investigating the root causes of emerging infectious diseases in support of a potential early warning system for future pandemics and a truly sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery plan.
- Our mandate across all the most important multilateral environmental agreements comprises all the elements responsible for global environmental health.
- Our three decades of practical, on-the-ground experience applying innovative solutions to environmental challenges of all kinds.
- Our focus on tackling the underlying drivers of environmental degradation, not just their symptoms.
- This Council meeting needs to also lay the foundation for an ambitious GEF-8 replenishment strategy focused on helping countries to "build back better", smarter and greener in response to the pandemic.
- A strategy that is not just about investing more money, but is realistic about the global targets that must be reached if the world is to be safe.
- The GEF's funding is tiny compared to the scale of needs that we need to address.
- If we are to succeed, we must increase our resources, be a partner of choice, and keep working with and leveraging other financiers, including those from the private sector.
- In addition, we must do all we can to both trigger national decisions that optimize the efficient investment of public expenditures and foster the sharing of best practices and knowledge amongst recipient countries.

- Ultimately, we need a strategy that has the support of both donor and recipient countries, as well as civil society and other partners at a critical time for the global environment.
- Friends and colleagues
- I am a rational optimist. I truly believe that 2020, despite the suffering it unleashed, will be a turning point.
- A moment when governments finally recognize the need to set meaningful zero carbon targets, the value of protecting our oceans, and what we stand to lose if we continue to treat nature as a finite resource.
- We're at the start of a new journey together, one where bold decisions and ambitions will result in a secure, healthy environment for all.
- Thank you all for your attention.