

60th GEF Council Meeting

June 14 – 18, 2021

Virtual Meeting

Opening of the Meeting

Remarks by

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, GEF CEO and Chairperson

As Delivered

Good morning

Welcome to the 60th GEF Council

I hope you, your families, friends, and colleagues remain safe and healthy, in what is still a very difficult time for all of us.

It is my great pleasure to welcome my co-chair, Mette Møglestue, Council member for the Constituency of Norway, Denmark, Latvia and Lithuania,

As you know, Mette has been designated as Elected Chairperson for 2021, and I very much look forward to working with her this week and in the months ahead.

Like the past two Council meetings, this session is being held virtually on account of the ongoing coronavirus outbreak that continues to ravage many countries and communities. I only hope this the last one we hold virtually, and that we will be physically together in person in December.

I want to take a moment to express my solidarity with everyone across the GEF partnership that has been or continues to be impacted by the pandemic.

Colleagues, friends

The pandemic was only a taste of what's to come if we do not ease the pressures on our planet.

We need to work together to defuse the crises in front of us – from climate change, biodiversity and wildlife habitat loss, land degradation, ocean pollution and depletion, and dangerous chemicals.

These emergencies need to be addressed together and integrated, not one at a time, and with everyone including the public and private sector, local communities, and civil society.

Yes, today, we are facing over-lapping environmental and social threats and tipping points that require a holistic attention.

But there are signs of hope.

We have the knowledge and the technology, there are enough financial resources from all sources.

And, never before has the political will and aspirations been so close to the scientific expectations and recommendations than today.

Societies recognize that the building back from the pandemic must be very different to what we had in 2020 and that it is in everybody's self-interest to deliver a green, blue, clean and resilient recovery.

We've seen strong political signals for more sustainability action coming from the recent, yesterday's, G7 meeting, along with regional meetings in developing countries, such as meetings of Central America environment ministers.

And in recent months there has been a steady drumbeat of more calls for sustainability from influential financial investors, shareholders, and big business.

Last but by no means least, new youth movements and civil society campaigns are galvanizing public support for the planet.

In this context the GEF is in the best possible position to be a positive agent of change for this great transition.

As you know, the first GEF-8 replenishment meeting was held in April.

The meeting brought together representatives of donor and recipient countries, civil society, and observers from the wider GEF community, including partner agencies, environmental conventions, the private sector, and international climate funds.

There were substantive conversations about how the GEF can scale up action on inter-related environmental threats, and general support for our ambitious plans and priorities.

With enough resources, more integration in our approaches and effectiveness in our processes the GEF is in an excellent position to scale up meaningful action even in places that have been hit hard by COVID-19.

This can also be done with the aspiration to accelerate the race to zero carbon emissions, phase out hazardous chemicals and be nature positive by the end of this decade.

I want to thank all of you who actively engaged in the April meeting, and those of you who have continued to share your views after that meeting.

This was only the start of a year-long process, but we have got off to a very good start so thank you so much!

Now, let me turn to the Council agenda before us.

It is definitely going to be a busy week, and I don't need to list all the items on the provisional timetable before you.

But, I do want to note that we will be receiving important reports from our colleagues in the IEO and STAP, and there will be a progress report on the independent third-party review of UNDP.

We will report on the follow up of UNDP related decisions from the 59th Council meeting, present the GEF business plan and the corporate budget for FY22.

We will also ask for your support for the formalization of an agreement for the long-term vision on complementarity, coherence, and collaboration between the GCF and the GEF.

Also, I'm extremely pleased that despite operational challenges, we will be presenting a high-quality, forward-looking trust fund work program.

While the Covid-19 pandemic continues to require new business practices and adaption to more virtual interactions, the GEF partnership has mostly found ways to do our business effectively and continue the implementation of existing projects, design high quality projects for endorsement, and engage with the proper stakeholders and country agencies to submit a strong pipeline of projects.

It's a great testament to all the colleagues across the GEF partnership – whether in the secretariat, agencies, or government that this has been done.

Internal practices in project review now include a COVID-19 screen that assesses the risks and opportunities associated with each project being submitted for consideration by the GEF. Special attention is given to projects that can contribute to a clean, resilient, blue, and green recovery.

In this work program many projects now consider some form of virtual engagement for the stakeholder engagement processes and other critical meetings needed for the design and preparation of projects for CEO endorsement.

Agencies are also aligning project objectives to play a central role in the mitigation of the impacts of the pandemic or contributing to the prevention of future pandemics. Examples include:

- Projects are proposing strategies to ensure that GEF investments can contribute to a green and blue recovery.
- The promotion of nature-based solutions as a measure to mitigate future pandemics.

There is a high degree of confidence that the projects and programs submitted to this Work Program have been prepared with proper due diligence. In many cases, it is possible to identify innovative thinking incorporated in the proposals that will

hopefully ensure that projects are not only managing the new risks created by the pandemic but also contributing to the prevention of future pandemics.

The \$281 million work program is the second-to-last under the GEF-7 replenishment cycle and spans 92 countries, including 30 Least Developed Countries and 35 Large Ocean and Small Island Developing States.

Later in the week, the LDCF/SCCF Council will consider another batch of projects valued at \$60 million focusing specifically on LDCs.

All of this would not have been possible without the excellent cooperation from everyone across the GEF partnership, and I applaud you for your efforts.

Also, it is important to say the climate resilience is high on the agenda this week.

It will of course be the focus of the LDCF/SCCF meetings and was also the topic at the GEF CSO consultation last Friday.

Many of you participated in what was an excellent discussion on the role of indigenous people and local communities in enhancing climate resilience, and achieving wider global climate and biodiversity goals.

The issue will also feature I'm sure in what promises to be an exciting session on Wednesday when the heads of the conventions will be with us.

In 2021, landmark COPs are expected for the CBD and UNFCCC. There will also be important developments with the Minamata, Stockholm, and UNCCD conventions.

We expect a full set of blueprints for global sustainability by 2030 to emerge from these meetings and related national efforts.

In closing, I want to remind you all that the GEF turns 30 this year!

In 1991, the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP came together to establish the GEF to address the world's most challenging environmental issues.

What started as a pilot program on the eve of the Rio Earth Summit has developed today into a unique partnership that unites 184 countries, 18 partner agencies and a growing network of civil society and private sector representatives.

Birthdays are occasions for celebration, and as well for reflection.

Our 30th anniversary is an opportune moment to both celebrate past achievements as well as highlight the challenges ahead of us.

For the next 6 months we will be running a campaign with our partners under the theme #ForThePlanet. I invite each and every-one of you to participate!

Finally, one year ago this Council appointed me as the new GEF CEO and Chairperson.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your confidence and trust given to me.

Also, to my colleagues at the Secretariat, I want to extend my greatest gratitude for your patience and guidance in what has truly been a very unconventional year.

Thank you so much.